

## Preliminary Recommendations of the Healthcare Cost Growth Benchmark Technical Team

### Comments

October 21, 2020

The Connecticut Health Foundation is pleased to submit the below comments to the Office of Health Strategy and the Healthcare Cost Growth Benchmark's Technical Team. As a foundation that focuses on health equity, with a particular focus on racial and ethnic health disparities, we are pleased that the state is looking at how to assure Connecticut residents have access to affordable and quality care.

The rising cost of health care is a threat to the welfare and wellbeing of so many. This problem is compounded for people of color through disparate access to health coverage<sup>1</sup> and income inequality. The racial income gap in Connecticut is particularly pronounced<sup>2</sup> and Black and Hispanic state residents are especially likely to report skipping medical care because of the cost.<sup>3</sup> The cost growth benchmark represents a key step toward controlling health care costs, which would put dollars back into the pockets of many who are struggling to meet their basic needs, as well as address the costs faced by taxpayers, consumers, and businesses.

While everyone in Connecticut would benefit from better managing health care costs, it is important to design a system that monitors for unintended consequences and assures that those most affected by high costs fully benefit from any interventions. We recommend tracking consumers' out-of-pocket spending, in addition to the premium, against the benchmark, to increase transparency on how the benchmark addresses these critical costs to buyers. To ensure there are no unintended effects on access to care, we urge the Office of Health Strategy to identify and implement the best strategies available for monitoring underutilization of care. We also recommend aligning the start of reporting on cost with quality benchmarks, to assure that the potential for underutilization can be monitored from the beginning.

We applaud the directive to increase primary care spending in Connecticut. To be most effective, it must be accompanied by standards to assure the added spending is targeted to achieve the expected results. The success of the primary care spending strategy is dependent on how closely aligned it is to improving health outcomes.

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<sup>1</sup> Arielle Levin Becker, "Health Disparities in Connecticut: Causes, Effects, and What We Can Do", Connecticut Health Foundation, (2019). – Black and Latino residents are less likely to have health coverage.

<sup>2</sup> Patrick R. O'Brien, "The State of Working Connecticut: Advancing Economic Justice in the Labor Market", Connecticut Voices for Children, (2020).

<sup>3</sup> Kaiser Family Foundation, "Adults who report not seeing a doctor in the past 12 months because of cost by race/ethnicity," 2019, available at: <https://www.kff.org/other/state-indicator/percent-of-adults-reporting-not-seeing-a-doctor-in-the-past-12-months-because-of-cost-by-raceethnicity/?currentTimeframe=0&selectedRows=%7B%22states%22:%7B%22connecticut%22:%7B%7D%7D%7D&sortModel=%7B%22colId%22:%22Location%22,%22sort%22:%22asc%22%7D>

Lastly, we endorse a robust plan to use data for further analysis, stratified by race and ethnicity. The lack of race and ethnicity data has hampered progress on health disparities in Connecticut and we are excited to see the potential to track, measure and eliminate health inequities. The analytical value of the cost growth benchmark project could be best leveraged by using the data in the health information exchange (HIE) in addition to the all-payer claims database, given the current requirement to include race and ethnicity data in the HIE. Also, in keeping with centering those who need help the most, we recommend a concerted focus on a method to capture the costs of the uninsured, who most directly incur the hardships of high health care costs.

Again, we commend the efforts of the state to move us closer to more affordable care. Our hope is that the quality benchmarks, primary care strategies and data collection will align to assure that people of color have the access to needed care and are ultimately healthier because of these efforts.

Sincerely,

Tiffany Donelson

President and CEO

Connecticut Health Foundation