



FY26 Dukes County Annual Report

Health and Human Services

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HEALTH CARE ACCESS

Health Care Access connects Island residents with Massachusetts affordable health insurance programs and helps them to retain this coverage. We provide public health insurance applications, enrollment, and retention services; information, referral, and advocacy; referrals to medical providers; help clients address medical debt; and we facilitate access to services like dental care, vision care, and prescription medication assistance. The Senior Assistance Program provides application assistance, benefits counseling, and program navigation for Island seniors and their families.

- ***4,253 individuals of all ages connected with affordable insurance programs through MassHealth and Health Connector application and enrollment assistance***
- ***680 seniors were assisted with Medicare, Medicare Part D, and Prescription Advantage; MassHealth Long Term Care & Frail Elder Waiver programs***
- ***7,100 times the HCA staff assisted clients access health insurance coverage for medical, dental and prescription expenses and other related referral assistance***

The Access Program is a grantee of the Massachusetts Health Connector's **Navigator Program**. The Navigator program is an outreach, education and enrollment program for health insurance required by the Affordable Care Act. The Access Program's enrollment staff participates in extensive training and passes an annual exam to maintain certified Navigator status.

Health Care Access Updates:

- Due to changes in federal regulations, some Affordable Care Act subsidies expired at the end of 2025, which decreased the availability of financial assistance for health insurance premiums for individuals and families starting in 2026. In addition, certain categories of enrolled members lost their eligibility for insurance, leading to higher rates of uninsurance in Massachusetts, including Dukes County.
- Health Access Specialists are now cross-training in two distinct public health insurance systems: 1) the Health Connector system for MassHealth and health plans for people who are 64 and under, and 2) Medicare for those 65 and older. This allows the program to more seamlessly assist Islanders as they transition to Medicare from MassHealth or private or employer insurance. Brianna Bertoni passed the SHINE (Medicare) certification in June, thus our capacity to serve Islanders of all ages, including Portuguese-speakers, continues to expand.
- Staff attended a celebration for the 20th anniversary of Massachusetts' landmark state health care reform legislation that led to the affordable health plans that are now in effect nationally. The April event was held in Boston and was attended by two past Massachusetts governors and our current governor.



FY26 Dukes County Annual Report

PUBLIC BENEFITS ACCESS

- *517 applications submitted for individuals of all ages for SNAP, Fuel Assistance, Unemployment benefits, housing, and cash assistance programs, and utility company discounts.*
- *781 times PBA provided assistance to access food, housing, and help with fuel and utility bills*

Public Benefits Access Updates:

- The Caseworker is now integrated into Harbor Homes' Homeless Prevention Outreach Team, which allows direct encounters with underserved and disadvantaged Islanders to assist with public benefits.
- Federal work requirements are now mandatory for people applying for SNAP benefits and have impacted eligibility for many Islanders, resulting in increased food insecurity. 160,000 Massachusetts residents, including 60,000 children, have lost their SNAP benefits due to these requirements. Added documentation requirements also increase the workload of the Caseworker.
- Program outreach continues across the Island with fliers and cards distributed in multiple locations across all 6 towns

EMERGENCY FUND SUPPORT

Health Care Access and Public Benefits Access provide emergency financial assistance to Islanders with medical-related expenses that they cannot afford. Primarily, we provide vouchers for copays for prescription medication and medical supplies. We also provide financial assistance for basic needs in the form of grocery store gift cards, transportation assistance, and other emergency assistance as needed.

In FY2026, we provided **\$9,432** in financial assistance to needy Islanders. The emergency fund is fully funded by donations and grants. Contributions to the fund came from the Elizabeth and Peter Tower Foundation, the United Methodist Church, individual donors, and local businesses.

VINEYARD SMILES DENTAL PROGRAM

Vineyard Smiles is the County's oral health initiative, established in 2005. Thanks to a collaboration with the Polished Teeth Dental Hygiene Program and the Towns' Boards of Health and other local partners, we were able to provide dental hygiene visits to **206 low-income adult patients** in February 2026 (in the midst of a blizzard, no less!). This included services for residents of Island Elderly Housing and at the Up Island Council on Aging. Many of these adult patients had not seen a dental professional in over 10 years; only 10% reported having a local dentist; and 13% had untreated decay and related periodontal disease. Martha's Vineyard Community Foundation sponsored this program in FY2026 with \$23,750.



FY26 Dukes County Annual Report

Funding: The County maintains an Intermunicipal Umbrella Agreement (IMA) with each of the six Island Towns for the ongoing funding of Health Care Access and Public Benefits Access as well as other regional programs. This IMA describes the governance structure; the County’s role and services provided; and the Towns’ fiscal obligations. Town funding for FY26 was \$653,854. The total budget for the department was \$882,682. The difference is supported by grants, contracts with our partners, and donations. Other FY26 funding sources totaling \$228,828 included funds from Island Health Care via the US Health Services Resources Administration, the Massachusetts Health Connector Authority, Martha’s Vineyard Hospital, Community Action Committee of Cape and Islands DTA SNAP Outreach Program via UMass, and South Shore Community Action Committee for fuel assistance, as well as limited contributions from individual donors.

Staff:

Interim Director of HHS (FY26)	Sarah Kuh	skuh@dukescounty.gov
Incoming Director of HHS (FY27)	Rocy Turner	director.hhs@dukescounty.gov
Health Access Specialists	Maria Mouzinho, Nikole Rolston, Brianna Bertoni, Sarah Kuh	
Administrative Assistant (FY26)	Ronelle Couture	hca@dukescounty.gov
Public Benefits Caseworker	Wendy Maseda	publicbenefits@dukescounty.gov