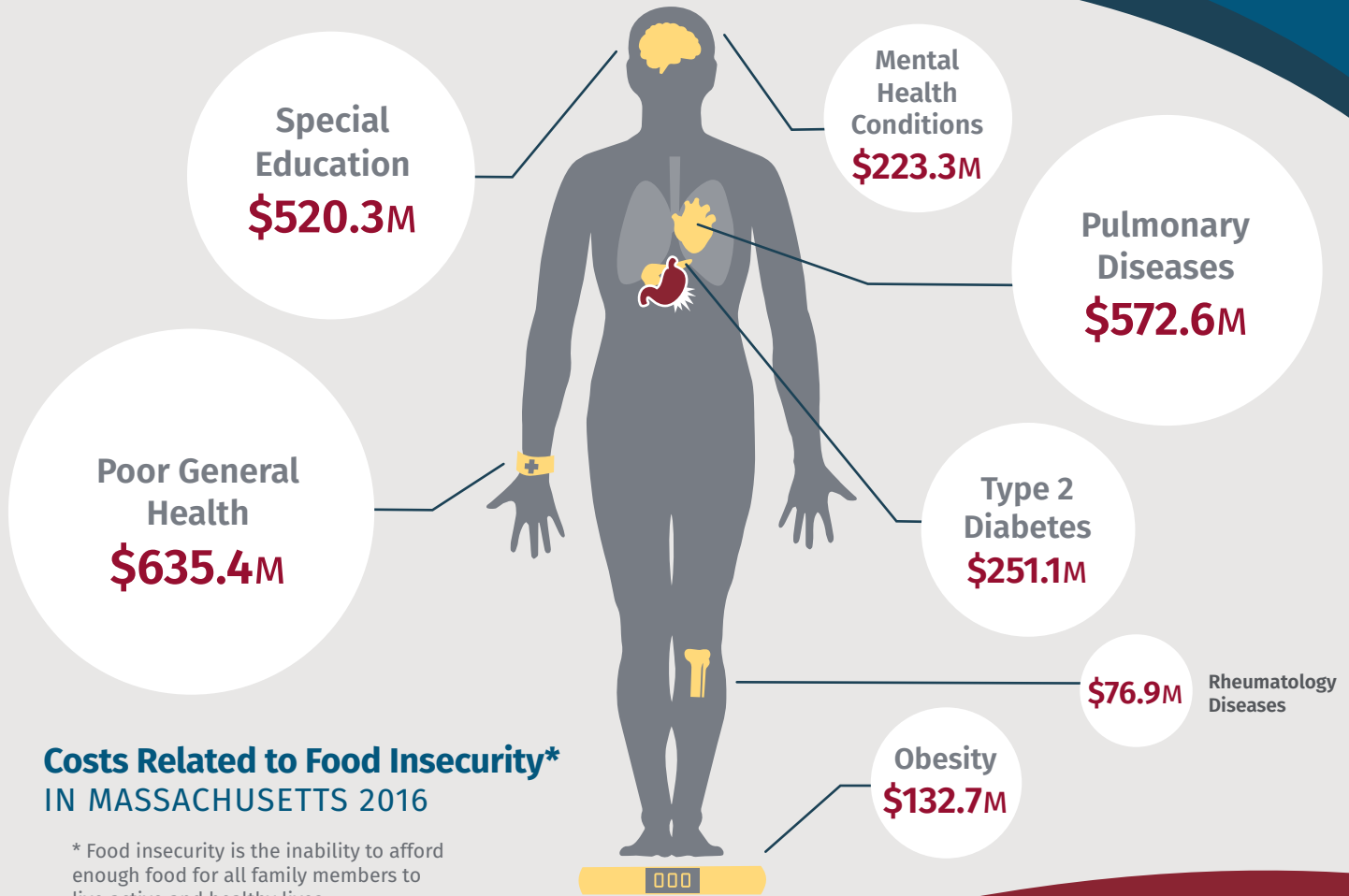


An Avoidable \$2.4 Billion Cost

FOOD INSECURITY AND HUNGER IN MASSACHUSETTS



What If Massachusetts could eliminate food insecurity?

A conservative \$2.4 billion per year would be saved in treating medical issues that are directly linked to food insecurity. Improving food security among Massachusetts residents would reduce healthcare costs for individuals, families, and the Commonwealth.

DOCTOR APPROVED

Policy Recommendations

HEALTHCARE SECTOR

Screen and intervene to address food insecurity in clinical settings. Healthcare providers should screen patients for food insecurity as part of the routine clinical visit using the American Academy of Pediatrics validated, simple and efficient, two-question screening tool, The Hunger Vital Sign™. Providers should refer patients who screen positive for food insecurity to resources that increase their access to healthy food, including government nutrition assistance programs, area food pantries and meal programs, and related services.

Reimburse providers for screening and intervention. Insurers should reimburse healthcare providers for Hunger Vital Sign™ screening and for intervention programs that improve access to healthy foods. In addition, accountable care organizations should include such programs in their package of reimbursable flexible services.

FEDERAL PUBLIC SECTOR

Maintain current funding and structure of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is our nation's largest program in the fight against food insecurity and hunger. Research shows SNAP improves health outcomes among children and adults. Any benefit cuts, eligibility changes, work requirements, time limits or structural changes would decrease benefits or reduce or block access to the program for people who depend on this vital program, putting them at higher risk for food-insecurity-related diseases and conditions.

STATE PUBLIC SECTOR

Increase Massachusetts Emergency Food Assistance Program (MEFAP) funding to \$20 million annually to ensure the Commonwealth's four food banks can purchase a consistent supply of healthy foods.

Create a common application for MassHealth and SNAP Programs to ensure low-income individuals and families applying for health insurance also have access to food assistance. Research has shown increased access to SNAP reduces MassHealth costs.

Mandate high-poverty schools serve breakfast after the bell to increase participation in the federal School Breakfast program. Recent studies indicate increased access to breakfast reduces school nurse visits.

Improve access to federal child nutrition assistance programs administered by the state, including the Child and Adult Care Food Program and the Summer Food Service Program to address nutritional needs of children in child care and in after-school and summer programs.

Increase funding for the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) in the state budget to ensure high quality services for eligible children and mothers and increase retention of participants in the program.