

Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) Statewide Kick Off

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Remarks delivered by Megan Sandel, MD, MPH

You may ask yourself why is a pediatrician coming today? I want to tell you about a magic medicine that reduces the risk of pre-term births, low birth weight babies, improve children's health, helps children perform better in school and may even make you live longer. Well, that magic medicine is the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC).

What we know is that a \$1,000 increase in EITC has been shown to reduce rates of low birth weight and preterm birth by 8-15%. Health care costs for low birth weight/pre-term infants are more than 25 times the average cost of hospital stays for uncomplicated newborns—and those born pre-term have increased odds of ongoing health and developmental challenges. If this was a drug, it would be in every pharmacy in the state.

One study even recently showed EITC may increased in life-expectancy among low-income Americans. That makes sense; EITC helps families put healthy food on the table, pay rent, and keep the heat and the lights on.

Like any good medicine, however, we must make sure that the medicine is available to all who need it, the dosage is right and the prescription can easily be filled. At the federal level, there is a lot of talk about tax reform, but it needs to benefit families and people who will have families in the future as much as corporations. Thank you, Rep. Neal for your continued dedication to ensuring EITC remains strong, and I hope you're talking your vitamins to keep healthy for the fight ahead.

Here in the Commonwealth, we also have an opportunity to improve and strengthen EITC by increasing the benefit from 23 percent to 50 percent of the federal level. This increase would provide the proper dosage for improving health outcomes across the state. We should also make sure that survivors of domestic violence and abandoned spouses, who would otherwise be eligible for the credit, are able to safely receive EITC. This support would provide an important resource for these families fleeing violence. Representative Marjorie Decker and Senator Eldridge have filed a bill that would increase the state EITC, ensure survivors of domestic violence are able to access the credit, and improve outreach so those who are eligible for EITC receive it. Allison Bovell at Children's HealthWatch leads the Healthy Families EITC Coalition who are working with Rep. Decker and Sen. Eldridge.

Finally, I want to thank all of you here who work hard to connect families with EITC through VITA sites, outreach, and education. We have started a VITA site at BMC called StreetCred through the support of the Boston Tax Help Coalition. The state should invest in tax preparation sites, which reduce barriers and brings EITC pharmacies into communities that need them most. We couldn't do it without you. Let's continue to make sure this magic medicine is available at the right dose and available to the people who need it.



88 East Newton Street
Vose Hall, 4th Floor
Boston, MA 02118

Phone: 617.414.6366
Fax: 617.414.7915
www.childrenshealthwatch.org