

Blueprint for Reform

2021-22



MINNESOTA BUSINESS PARTNERSHIP



Preface

Minnesotans have always had a great deal pride in their state, and it's not hard to see why. Among the state's many enviable qualities are:

- A highly educated, increasingly diverse workforce.
- A diversified economy and a high concentration of Fortune 500 companies and other large, innovative businesses.
- A generally high-performing educational system and a reputation for nation-leading reforms (e.g. charter schools, PSEO).
- A remarkably high quality of life, albeit one that must be made more attainable for all Minnesotans.
- World-class artistic and cultural institutions.

But as the multiple crises of 2020 laid bare, our state faces many acute challenges that threaten our economic future and tear at the social fabric. As Minnesota emerges from an extraordinarily difficult year unlike any in recent history, it faces daunting challenges:

- The COVID-19 pandemic that continues to rage, even as vaccines offer hope of better days ahead.
- Academic achievement gaps that are among the nation's worst, further exacerbated by inequities brought on by distance learning.
- Social upheaval/unrest in the wake of institutional racism and longstanding racial disparities.
- A volatile and turbulent economy, and a policy and regulatory environment that threatens our ability to recover.

Nonetheless, the Minnesota Business Partnership is confident that Minnesota can - and will - emerge from these crises stronger than ever. Lawmakers and other leaders in the public policy arena have a crucial role to play in that process.

It is with that in mind that we offer the **Blueprint for Reform 2021-22**, which articulates our broad, long-term policy vision on fiscal, education, and health care policy issues. We look forward to working with policymakers to ensure Minnesota remains a great place to live, work, and grow.

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Blueprint for Fiscal Policy Reform

Innovative and diverse Minnesota businesses are the backbone of the state's economy. But past success does not guarantee future prosperity, and Minnesota's tax code and business climate create burdens that may hinder long-term economic growth. Lawmakers should evaluate policy decisions with a global view and address present-day challenges with solutions that will enhance Minnesota's future competitiveness in the global economy.

Globalization, technological advances, demographic changes, and other forces are causing fundamental changes to the economy that make existing state spending trends unsustainable. In addition to unsustainable spending trends, Minnesota has an antiquated and burdensome tax structure that forces Minnesota-based businesses to shoulder a heavy and growing load while they compete in a dynamic worldwide economy. Reforms are necessary to position the state for greater economic growth and reduce the effect of economic shocks on the state budget.

The Competitiveness Challenge

Minnesota businesses and entrepreneurs are faced with some of the nation's highest tax burdens. The state's tax structure deters business expansion and relocation in Minnesota and discourages companies from locating high-skill, high paying jobs here. Our anti-competitive tax code contributed to Minnesota ranking 46th out of the 50 states in the Tax Foundation's State Business Tax Climate Index. As Minnesota competes with other states and countries for future investment and job growth, lawmakers should be mindful of how Minnesota's tax and business climate compares to our competitors.

The Structural Challenge

Minnesota's tax code was developed to meet the needs of the 20th century's goods-based economy, but our outdated tax system now creates barriers to business investment and job creation in our mobile, global, knowledge-based economy. In addition, Minnesota relies disproportionately on volatile revenue sources like high personal and corporate income taxes, which has contributed to the unpredictable fiscal forecasts that we've seen in recent years. Reforms are needed to construct a simplified, streamlined, 21st century tax system that will generate job growth, promote private-sector investment, and create stable and sustainable budgets.

The Spending Challenge

It will take more than belt-tightening to create sustainable budgets. The public sector must innovate to maintain essential services and a high quality of life. Developing new and better ways to set budgets, deliver services, and meet public needs will improve the business climate.

Spending growth in the largest areas of Minnesota's general fund budget, including health and human services (HHS), is accelerating far faster than the economy. Although HHS spending growth has been mitigated somewhat through recent reforms, the state is expected to continue to see double-digit increases in the near future. Spending restraint and further reforms will be necessary to address this issue.

GUIDING PRINCIPLE



The state should foster private-sector investment and job creation, reduce revenue volatility, strengthen Minnesota's global competitiveness, and ensure that businesses are not penalized for locating, investing, or growing in Minnesota.

Personal Income Taxes

Minnesota has the nation's 2nd highest income tax rate for joint filers at the \$273,000 income level* and the fifth highest rate overall. These extraordinarily high rates suppress business expansion because business income often flows through personal income tax returns. High rates also make it difficult to attract top talent to the state and make it more expensive for businesses to locate high paying jobs in Minnesota. Recent federal changes to the State and Local Tax (SALT) deduction will only exacerbate this competitive disadvantage

**2nd
highest personal
income tax rate***

Corporate Taxes

Minnesota's high corporate income tax rate is a substantial barrier to attracting new business investment to the state. The 9.8% "billboard rate" is the 4th highest in the nation and contributes to the state's reputation for having an unfavorable business climate. Furthermore, the corporate tax is regressive, volatile, expensive to administer, and leads to higher prices and lower wages.

One bright spot related to the state's corporate income tax is that lawmakers, on a bipartisan basis, enacted single sales apportionment. Prior to 2014, the state apportioned corporate income using the Minnesota proportions of a business's sales, payroll, and property. This created a disincentive to expand operations or hire more employees in Minnesota. Under current law, the state now apportions income based on sales only ("single sales").

**4th
highest corporate
income tax rate**

Policymakers should consider several reforms related to the corporate tax, including reducing the rate, increasing the research and development tax credit, and targeting corporate tax relief to Minnesota-based companies and those with a significant presence in the state. In a highly competitive global economy, it is counterproductive to penalize companies for competing and succeeding in international markets. International success creates good-paying jobs at Minnesota headquarters, and strengthens Minnesota's standing as a "headquarters state".

Property Taxes

Minnesota's high business property taxes are a competitive disadvantage for Minnesota-based employers and are a barrier to investment in the state. Minnesota businesses bear a disproportionate property tax burden for two reasons: because businesses pay higher local tax rates than other property types and because of a separate statewide business property tax.

**7th
highest business
property tax burden
(metro)**

The statewide business property tax is a burden on businesses of all sizes, including those that do not own property but pay the tax through their lease. It is more regressive than overall Minnesota state and local taxes.

Until 2017, the tax also had an auto-inflator that increased the levy each year. The levy is currently \$787 million/year.



Sales Taxes

The composition of Minnesota's economy has changed dramatically over the past 50 years. In 1963, the goods-producing sectors of the economy, like manufacturing, construction, and mining, comprised 41 percent of the state's economy. That share of the economy has shrunk to just 24 percent, while the services-producing sectors have increased from 59 percent to 76 percent of Minnesota's economy.

The sales tax is among the most stable sources of revenue for the state. But Minnesota's sales tax is increasingly top heavy. At 6.875%, Minnesota's state sales tax rate is the fourth highest in the nation. But the tax falls on a narrow base. Minnesota's sales tax should be updated by moving to a lower tax rate and broadening the tax base to include additional consumer goods and services, without taxing business inputs or business-to-business services, which results in "tax pyramiding."



Tax Structure and Revenue Volatility

One of the state's greatest fiscal challenges is its existing tax structure that contributes to budget volatility and is misaligned with the modern economy. Minnesota's corporate income tax revenue has varied by as much as 42% year-over-year, making it difficult to properly budget when revenues are unpredictable. And compared to other states, Minnesota is heavily reliant upon relatively volatile individual income tax revenue, accounting for 32% of state and local tax collections compared to 23% for all other states. In contrast, sales tax revenue is more reliable since consumption stays relatively steady even during economic downturns. Policymakers should reduce reliance on highly volatile personal and corporate income taxes and move toward a broader, consumption-based sales tax on final retail purchases, without taxing business-to-business services.

Regulations and Mandates

Excessive state and local regulations and mandates substantially increase business costs and complexity, and create a perception that Minnesota is hostile to business. In recent years, a proliferation of onerous local workplace mandates has created a regulatory patchwork that imposes substantial legal, administrative, operational, and financial burdens on businesses of all sizes.

In an increasingly competitive and mobile economy that offers businesses an unprecedented level of choice in where to locate and grow, Minnesota simply cannot afford to be a regulatory outlier. State policymakers can help unwind the regulatory maze by preempting local government mandates and eschewing rigid one-size-fits-all mandates that fail to take into account existing employer-provided benefits, discourage job growth, create uncertainty, and inhibit business investment.

GUIDING PRINCIPLE



State budget reforms should focus on outcomes and priorities, encourage fiscal restraint, improve service delivery, and produce desired results.

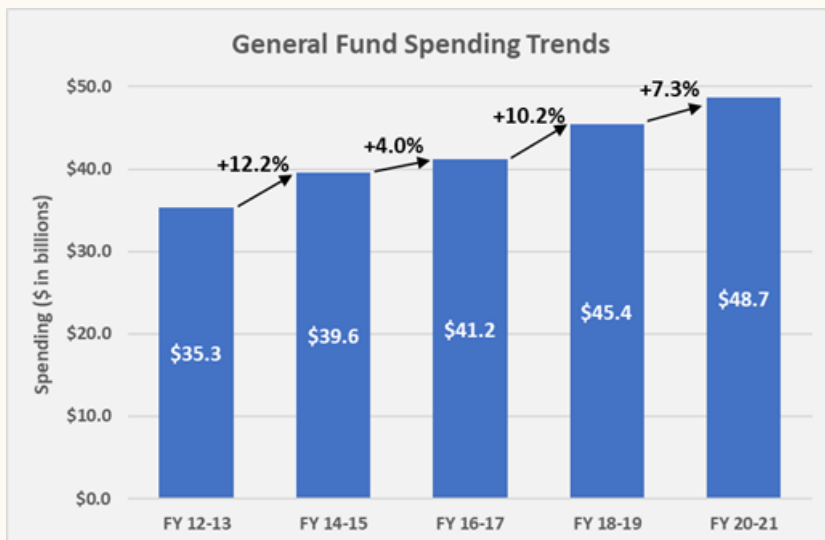
Priority-Based Budgeting and Sustainable Spending

Long-term budget stability requires that state spending be aligned with long-term economic growth. However, with few exceptions, spending growth in Minnesota's recent state budgets has substantially outpaced economic growth. This imbalance has been sustained only through budget shifts and tax increases on individuals and businesses. Tax increases offer only temporary relief because the major government spending areas continue to grow faster than the state's economy.

State lawmakers should utilize priority-based budgeting to set clear and specific priorities, identify indicators to monitor progress, and purchase services to achieve desired outcomes. Lawmakers should also consider the impact of funding proposals on Minnesota's competitiveness and overall tax burden. For example, policymakers should make transportation a high priority when setting the state's general fund budget by dedicating a percentage of transportation-related general fund revenues to transportation, and prioritize targeted scholarships to expand access to early childhood education for low income families.

11th
highest total spending
per household

2nd
highest public welfare
spending



Innovation and Partnerships

State government should leverage private-sector expertise and innovations to increase efficiency, productivity, and quality in areas including strategic sourcing, information technology, health care, transportation, and economic development. Examples include streamlining administration, using competitive bidding and strategic sourcing to deliver government services, and aligning public sector compensation with the private sector.



Blueprint for Education Policy Reform

Minnesota students deserve great schools and quality education. Our continued economic growth as a state depends on maintaining our highly skilled workforce. However, worst-in-nation education gaps continue to leave too many Minnesotans behind and unable to unlock access to economic opportunities.

Historically, Minnesota's K-12 public education system has been recognized as one of the top-performing systems in the nation, with students generally performing well compared to peers in other states. However, our results mask wide disparities in our own state - Minnesota has some of the largest education gaps by race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status in the nation.

Minnesota has struggled for generations to provide quality education to low-income students and students of color. Unfortunately, little progress is being made. Racial and income gaps in standardized test scores and college readiness have increased over time. Overall graduation rates have increased but wide disparities still remain. Our global, knowledge-based economy increasingly requires people to complete at least some level of post-secondary education, yet Minnesota is graduating an increasing proportion of students who are unprepared for college.

Minnesota needs to work with great urgency to eliminate education gaps. This urgency is heightened by the need to act to address racial disparities and remove the systemic barriers in education that are a root cause of racial inequity.

EDUCATION GAPS IN MINNESOTA

	Percentage of students scoring at grade level		Graduation rates	College readiness
	Grade 4 Reading	Grade 8 Math	%	%
Across race				
White	65.3	65.0	88.4	68.9
American Indian/Alaska Native	31.0	25.3	51.0	27.8
Asian	47.5	62.7	86.6	49.0
Black	30.6	28.7	67.4	24.7
Hispanic	32.1	35.3	66.8	36.2
Across socio-economic status				
Eligible for free/reduced-price meals	35.8	36.3	70.2	36.0
Across urban and rural school districts				
Urban	56.0	57.0	84.5	NA
Rural	57.1	59.1	89.0	NA
All Students	55.5	57.0	83.2	58.8

Sources: Minnesota Department of Education, Minnesota Office of Higher Education, ACT Research

Recognizing the importance of education, education spending is the largest spending area in the Minnesota state budget, with 42% of the general fund budget dedicated to E-12 education and 7% dedicated to postsecondary education.

Key strengths of Minnesota's education finance system:

1. 68% percent of school funding comes from state sources (as opposed to local property taxes) and Minnesota ranks 4th in the nation for state share of education funding.¹
2. Minnesota has successfully reduced variation in education inputs, such as per capita expenditures across districts and class sizes across schools.²
3. Minnesota provides more in state and local funding to the highest poverty districts compared to the lowest poverty districts.³

Education Funding At a Glance

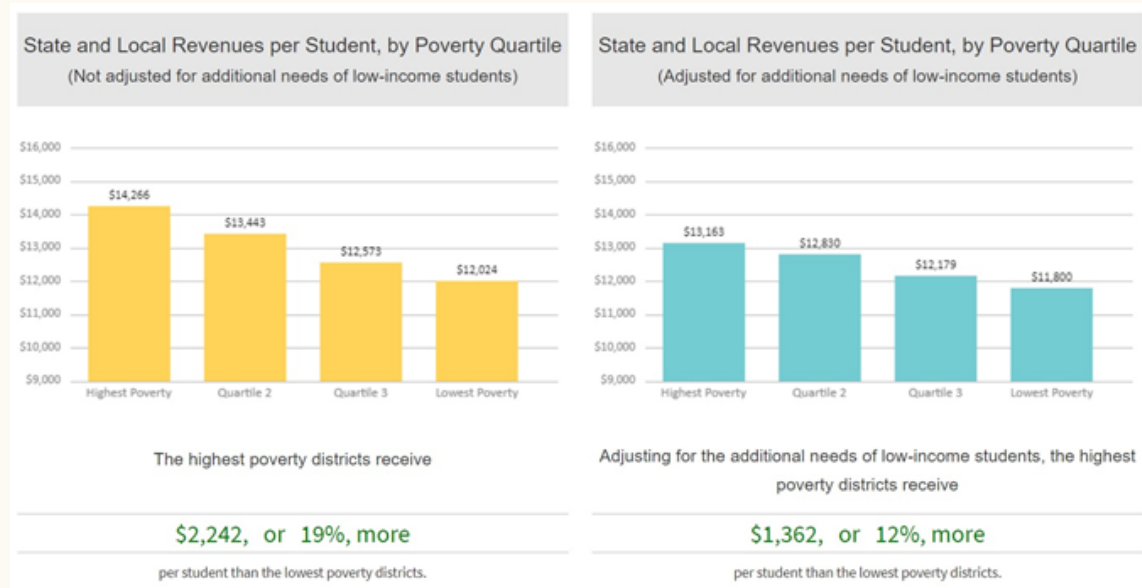
\$13,512 average annual per student spending

42 percent of the state budget devoted to E-12

Minnesota ranks **4th** in the nation for state share of education funding

High-poverty districts receive **19 percent** more state/local aid than low-poverty districts

DIFFERENCES IN FUNDING BETWEEN MINNESOTA'S HIGHEST AND LOWEST POVERTY DISTRICTS



Source: Education Trust

Nonetheless, many schools face financial challenges stemming from factors such as declining enrollment, contract settlements that exceed funding increases, and the federal government's unwillingness to meet its obligation for funding special education.

The COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated education funding pressures on school districts - and it has highlighted systemic failure to equitably meet student needs. As Minnesota navigates changes in education delivery due to the pandemic, it is more important than ever that education funding be targeted to adequately and equitably meet the needs of students, especially those with extra challenges, and schools be provided with flexibility to make key fiscal decisions.

¹ Minnesota House of Representatives, Minnesota School Finance: A Guide for Legislators, November 2020

² Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis, Statewide Crisis: Minnesota's Education Achievement Gaps, October 2019

³ Education Trust, "The State of Funding Equity in Minnesota" and "Funding Gaps 2018"

GUIDING PRINCIPLE



Ensure all children have access to quality education and accelerate proven strategies to close worst-in-the-nation education gaps.

Significant systemic changes are needed to ensure all children have equitable access to quality education. One of the most impactful levers for education equity is to affirm that all children have the equal right to a quality education through an amendment to the Minnesota Constitution and elevate the state's requirement to provide education from "adequate" to "quality".

The State's duty toward its children is not satisfied unless it provides equal educational opportunities for all children.

– JUSTICE ALAN PAGE, DISSENTING, SKEEN V. STATE, MINNESOTA SUPREME COURT, 1993

Addressing systemic inequalities means advancing strategies that have demonstrated success in closing education gaps. Starting early is important. Improving early literacy will improve students' educational trajectory - students who do not achieve reading proficiency by the end of third grade fall further behind and often never catch up.

Teacher diversity is important to closing education gaps. Accelerating teacher preparation programs that recruit, train, and mentor teachers of color will greatly increase diversity. "Last-in, first-out" (LIFO) policies adversely impact teachers of color - it is crucial to continue LIFO reforms so all schools are required to make retention decisions based on quality.

Another education gap that has come to the forefront during the COVID-19 pandemic is the digital divide. Many low-income students and students of color cannot access the technology or supports now essential for distance learning. To make certain students do not fall further behind, efforts to close the digital divide and support students in distance learning should be championed.

Looking forward, it is important that all students are prepared for college and ready for the 21st Century workforce. Closing college-preparation gaps and increasing the number of students who graduate postsecondary programs is important for Minnesota's future. Improving college-readiness and expanding programs that bridge school and work will help all Minnesotans access opportunities for bright futures.

Student-Teacher racial mismatch in Minnesota

The share of students of color in Minnesota's public schools has been rapidly growing, while the share of teachers of color has remained stagnant.

Percentage of teachers and students of color



*Combines part-time and full-time teachers

Source: Minnesota Department of Education and the Minnesota Professional Educator Licensing and Standards Board

GUIDING PRINCIPLE



Set world-class academic standards for students, measure progress towards meeting those standards, and use data for continuous improvement.

Minnesota's student academic standards are designed to prepare students for post-secondary and career success. Cooperatively developed by K-12 and post-secondary educators, employers, and the public, Minnesota's standards-based strategy has created more flexibility for teachers to provide instruction by focusing on what students should know, not how teachers should teach. In addition, standards help achieve equity by setting consistent expectations.

Minnesota measures student progress with a set of reading, math, and science tests specifically aligned with state standards called the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments (MCAs). Student participation in the MCAs is critical to help parents and educators accurately gauge student progress and inform the public on student achievement and school performance.

Education data is a critical tool for evaluating progress, identifying effective practices, and addressing disparities. Now more than ever, parents must be equipped with data on how schools are doing and how students are progressing. To that end, lawmakers should consider ways to increase the amount, relevancy, and accessibility of information available. Strengthening use of data will also help ensure investments in education are being used effectively to improve student achievement, support proven classroom practices, and narrow racial and socio-economic achievement gaps.



GUIDING PRINCIPLE



Empower families to choose the schools and programs that best meet their children's needs and empower educators with the flexibility to provide effective programs and services.

Minnesota's business community has been a leading advocate for expanding access to schools and programs that best meet the needs of families. Providing families with the ability to choose their children's programs and schools not only empowers parents but it also allows educators to customize instruction.

Starting with the earliest learners, expanding access to quality childcare and early education programs for low-income families is critical to closing education gaps. High-quality childcare and education programs have been shown to improve school readiness, reduce grade retention and special education, and increase high school graduation rates and college enrollment. Increasing childcare provider reimbursement rates and expanding early learning scholarships will empower more families with access to quality childcare and preschool programs.

Expanding options for low-income families improves educational outcomes and encourages school districts to improve school performance. An important option is charter schools – high-performing charter schools can greatly improve outcomes for students, especially for low-income students. Tuition tax credits also provide more options for low-and-middle income families by providing them with the means to select a K-12 school of choice for their children.





Blueprint for Health Care Policy Reform

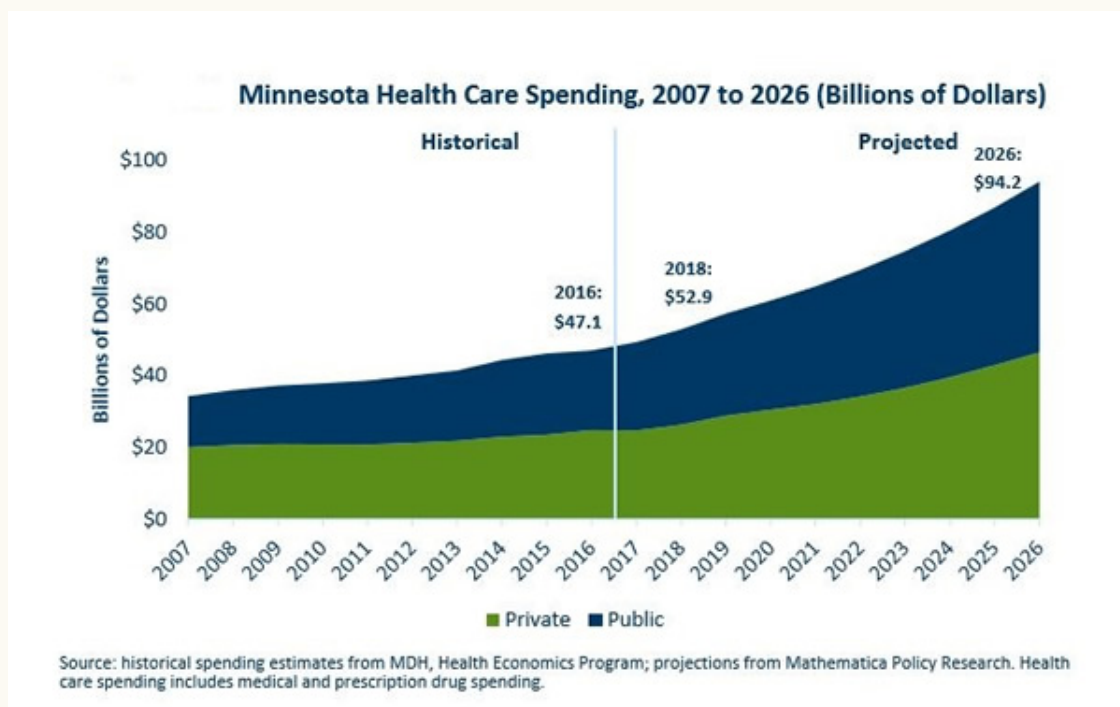
Minnesota remains a national leader in health care with high quality of care, low rate of uninsured, high rate of private insurance, and a comparatively healthy population. Still, rising costs remain an enormous challenge for Minnesota employers, individuals, and state government. Despite slightly slower growth in recent years, projections show total health care spending in Minnesota nearly doubling between 2016 and 2026, when it will account for one-fifth of the state's economic activity. Numerous factors are causing the ongoing cost explosion:

Price, Utilization & Eligibility: Increases in prices for medical services and growth in utilization are primary drivers of spending. State program eligibility expansion generated significant enrollment growth in public programs.

Demographics: Illnesses and corresponding costs rise with age and underserved populations. Minnesota's aging population is leveling off and being replaced by younger residents, many of whom depend on public health care programs.

Technology & Drugs: New technologies and expensive pharmaceutical products are constantly emerging and consumers frequently try every treatment available regardless of whether it is likely to improve their care or quality of life. Balancing this are new technologies that can help reduce the cost of care if properly deployed and utilized.

Inefficiency: Wasteful spending is caused by defensive medicine; redundant, inappropriate, or unnecessary tests and procedures; and individuals maintaining unhealthy lifestyles and not adhering to medical advice and prescriptions.



To create a sustainable system with improved quality and lower costs, comprehensive reforms are needed to engage consumers, align purchasers, and reorient providers and insurers to find and deliver market-driven efficiencies.

Minnesota should pursue a balanced approach to reform in order to ensure a functioning and responsive health care marketplace that achieves optimal health outcomes, reduces costs, and increases access to affordable care. Our rich tradition of health care leadership and market-based innovation can create new solutions to meet the specific needs of patients and providers.



GUIDING PRINCIPLE



Support a market-based, patient-centered health system that increases quality, fosters innovation, and reduces costs.

Outcomes-Oriented System

To rein in costs and improve care, the health care system should replace outdated and inefficient fee-for-service payment models with innovative value-based payment models that reward quality, consumer satisfaction, and cost savings. The state should remove regulatory barriers and make utilization data uniformly available to encourage collaboration and facilitate coordinated care, but maintain antitrust policies in the insurance and provider sectors to avoid anti-competitive pricing practices.

Reducing Cost

Policymakers should consider several reforms to alleviate growing health care costs, including addressing uncompensated care costs directly and transparently – not by cost-shifting to the private sector. Data suggests providers are charging more for patients covered by commercial plans to compensate for relatively low government rates. For example, according to the Minnesota Hospital Association, Minnesota's public health care programs currently pay providers less than the actual cost of care—amounting to about half of what a commercial plan pays. Lawmakers should also reform medical malpractice laws to reduce the practice of defensive medicine while ensuring adequate patient protection.

Efficient and Effective Government Health Care Programs

Minnesota's health care system should be private, market-based, patient-centered, and offer broad competitive choice of provider, insurer, and coverage options. Government should enhance a strong and functional health care marketplace by providing safety net programs, setting standards for the health care sector, and supporting delivery and payment innovations.

To ensure government health care programs are effective and efficient, policymakers should evaluate program benefits according to national and peer state benchmarks and consider aligning Minnesota to other high performing states. Beneficiaries of public health programs should be empowered to use providers and plans that deliver cost-effective, quality care.

Funding for government health care programs should rely on broad-based, equitable revenue sources, and designated health care revenue should be used only for health care purposes. Finally, government should not limit reserves of private companies under business contracts with the State. Reserves protect consumers and ensure businesses' solvency and should not be used to finance government operations.

Transparent and Actionable Measurement

Health care providers and systems should be measured on their ability to keep patients healthy and avoid unnecessary services and costs, but cost and quality measurements are not always transparent or meaningful to health coverage purchasers. Providing understandable information will engage consumers and help them make value-based decisions. The state should support the work of existing nationally recognized community-based organizations (including the Institute for Clinical Systems Improvement and Minnesota Community Measurement)

to define common expectations and measurements for plans and providers. Rather than duplicate private sector efforts in this area, the State should use them for its own programs. The state should support the use of provider cost and quality comparisons and make them available to consumers.

Innovation and Flexibility

The state should foster market-based innovation and flexibility in Minnesota's health care system. This includes supporting the development and use of health information technology (HIT), and supporting statewide IT protocol for sharing appropriate clinical data among providers to improve quality, safety, and efficiency. Policymakers should reject restrictions, regulations, or taxes on self-insured employers that may inhibit market-based, patient-centered innovation or hinder employers' ability to address unique challenges of cross-border employee populations, and avoid one-size-fits-all service and payment models that stifle innovation and freeze ideas in place.

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President and CEO, **HealthPartners**

Jeff Harmening

President, **Minnesota Business Partnership**
Chairman and CEO, **General Mills**

Doug Baker

Chair, Fiscal Policy Committee, **Minnesota Business Partnership**
Chairman, **Ecolab**

Archie Black

Chair, Education and Workforce Policy Committee, **Minnesota Business Partnership**
President and CEO, **SPS Commerce, Inc.**

Russ Becker

Co-Chair, Health Policy Committee, **Minnesota Business Partnership**
President and CEO, **APi Group**

Dr. Ken Holmen

Co-Chair, Health Policy Committee, **Minnesota Business Partnership**
President and CEO, **CentraCare**

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Corie Barry, Best Buy Co., Inc.

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Craig Samitt, M.D., Blue Cross Blue Shield of Minnesota

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Kathleen Dolphin, Dolphin Group Cos

Tod Carpenter, Donaldson Company

Bill Stoeri, Dorsey & Whitney LLP

Doug Baker, Ecolab Inc.

David Herman, M.D., Essentia Health

Mike O'Leary, EY

Andrew Humphrey, Faegre Drinker Biddle & Reath LLP

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Gillette Children's Specialty Healthcare

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Jim Owens, H. B. Fuller Company

Andrea Walsh, HealthPartners

Jim Snee, Hormel Foods Corporation

Stanley Hubbard, Hubbard Broadcasting, Inc.

John Ashe, IWCO Direct

Geoff Glasrud, Koch Companies Public Sector, LLC

James Powell, KPMG LLP

Beth Ford, Land O'Lakes, Inc.

Robert Frost, Lazard

Matt Homan, Liberty Diversified International

Russell Lund III, Lunds & Byerlys

David Mortenson, M.A. Mortenson Co.

Jill Renslow, Mall of America

Gianrico Farrugia, M.D., Mayo Clinic

Tom McGough, Jr., McGough Construction Co.

John Naylor, Medica

Geoff Martha, Medtronic, Inc.

Devinder Malhotra, Minnesota State

Chad Dunkley, New Horizon Academy

J. Kevin Croston, M.D., North Memorial Health Care

Suresh Krishna, Northern Tool

Beth Wozniak, nVent

Tim Murnane, The Opus Group

Chuck MacFarlane, Otter Tail Corp.

Chris Steele, D.D.S., Park Dental

Mark Walchirk, Patterson Companies

John Stauch, Pentair, Ltd.

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Scott Wine, Polaris Industries Inc.

Jon Cherry, PolyMet Mining

Howard Friedman, Post Consumer Brands

Daniel Lindh, Presbyterian Homes & Services

Vickie Holt, Proto Labs Inc.

Eric Mercer, PwC

Michael Armstrong, RBC Wealth Management-U.S.

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Tom Rosen, Rosen's Diversified Inc.

Hugh Miller, RTP Company

Brian Murray, Ryan Companies US, Inc.

Dimitrios Smyrniotis, Schwan's Company**Chris Hilger, Securian Financial Group**

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Chris Simpson, Wenger Corporation

Michael Happe, Winnebago, Ind.

Ben Fowke III, Xcel Energy

* *Bold denotes Executive Committee member*

Minnesota Business Partnership - Staff

CONTACT US

612-370-0840

mnbp.com

[@BizPartnership](https://twitter.com/BizPartnership)

Charlie Weaver

Executive Director

Charlie.R.Weaver@mnbp.com

Jill Larson

Deputy Executive Director

Fiscal Policy Director

Jill.Larson@mnbp.com

Amy Walstien

Education and Workforce Policy Director

Amy.Walstien@mnbp.com

Dan Dwight

Health Policy Director

Dan.Dwight@mnbp.com

Jonathan Blake

Communications Director

Jonathan.Blake@mnbp.com

Katie Nadeau

Operations Director

Katie.Nadeau@mnbp.com

Rhianna Gawrys

Project Manager

Rhianna.Gawrys@mnbp.com