



**Connecticut Office of Health Strategy Testimony in Support of
House Bill 6439 – AAC the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30, 2023
Executive Director Victoria Veltri
February 23, 2021**

Good afternoon, Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Miner, Representative France, and members of the Appropriations Committee. I am Victoria Veltri, Executive Director of the Office of Health Strategy (OHS), and I am here to testify in support of the Governor's Biennial Budget for fiscal years 2022 and 2023. OHS was established in 2018 with strong bipartisan support of the General Assembly to centralize health policymaking, better coordinate existing state resources, and advance the reforms that will drive down healthcare costs; address our State's deeply entrenched racial, economic, and gender health disparities; and undertake technology-driven modernization efforts by convening and coordinating the state's health information technology (HIT) initiatives. OHS' mission is to implement comprehensive data driven strategies that promote equal access to high-quality healthcare, control costs and ensure better health outcomes for the people of Connecticut. A healthy population creates value for employers, is necessary for a strong economy, and is key to a high quality of life. We collaborate with a variety of partners, experts, consumers, and stakeholder groups that help us examine and address the barriers in Connecticut's health system—cost, access, and outcomes. OHS must be responsive to the ever-evolving healthcare landscape. We continue to examine the impact of federal rule changes and promote initiatives that strengthen health and healthcare in Connecticut.

Proposed 2022 - 2023 Biennial Budget

Governor Lamont's proposed OHS budget totals \$12.9 million in FY 2022; \$2.8 million from the General Fund and \$10.1 million from the Insurance Fund. For FY 2023, the proposed amount is \$13.1 million; \$2.9 million from the General Fund and \$10.2 million from the Insurance Fund. The \$6.8 million expansion (in both funds) for FY 2022 and \$6.9 million in FY2023 - which will be partly reimbursed by federal Medicaid funds and hospital assessment - is necessary to support health information technology (HIT) and Health Information Exchange (HIE) initiatives. This includes funding for seven additional staff that will support OHS' statutory responsibility to coordinate statewide HIT initiatives, including administrative oversight of the Health Information Exchange. The budget also reflects cost of living adjustments for both fiscal years and one extra payroll (27 pay periods) in fiscal year 2023.

Below are some of the highlights of the biennial budget:

- In January 2020, Governor Lamont signed [Executive Order No. 5](#) directing OHS to establish a statewide healthcare cost growth benchmark with the goals of: 1) slowing the growth of healthcare spending to make healthcare more affordable for consumers, 2) establishing targets for increased primary care spending, 3) develop clinical quality benchmarks, 4) monitor and report annually on healthcare spending growth, and 5) monitor accountable care organizations and alternative payment model adoption. To support these new directives, OHS formed the [Primary Care and Community Health Reforms work group](#) to recommend primary care spend targets for 2022-2024, as well as strategies for investing in primary care to improve access, quality and the patient and provider experience. OHS also convened a [Quality Council](#) to develop clinical quality benchmarks to be effective for calendar year 2022. Finally, OHS will maximize a complementary data use strategy that leverages the state's [All-Payer Claims Database](#) and other sources of health data to analyze cost and cost drivers.
- The [Health Enhancement Communities \(HEC\) initiative](#) builds upon the success of the State Innovation Model (SIM) by promoting collaboration and coordination of community organizations, there are currently nine HECs in Connecticut, to focus on improving the health and well-being of consumers by bringing

together residents and multiple sectors that impact the health and well-being of children, families, and communities across the state. These HECs support their community, identify and pursue strategies to address social determinants of health, and foster local collaboration among traditional healthcare providers and other service providers. OHS continues to pursue near-term funding and long-term sustainability financing strategies and was awarded a US Office of Minority Health grant to help continue this important work.

- OHS continues to administer the Certificate of Need (CON) program, a regulatory and planning tool designed to improve access to high-quality health services, minimize unnecessary duplication of services, and facilitate healthcare market stability. In 2020, OHS issued 21 CON decisions, 50 CON determinations and held two public hearings.
- OHS continues to receive annual and biannual hospital financial, utilization, statistical and provider inventory data to support CON decision making and inform policymakers of health care utilization and cost trends, gaps in services and health disparities, the financial status of acute care hospitals, and issues related to surprise billing and medical debt. This includes the [Statewide Healthcare Facilities and Services Plan](#), [FY19 Financial Status of Connecticut's Short Term Hospitals](#), and the [2015-2019 Facility Fee Filing Trend report](#).
- Consistent with its mandate to coordinate the State's HIT initiatives, OHS continues development of the five-year statewide HIT plan to promote the effective use of existing and emerging technologies to effectively respond to consumers' needs through effective and meaningful data management and analysis. This level of detail is crucial to achieving the State's goals of improving care, access, equity and quality while reducing costs. Maximizing the utility of reported hospital data, as well as the [All-Payer Claims Database](#) managed by OHS, we continue to develop tools to promote transparency into the cost and quality of healthcare in Connecticut. Building on [2019's Self-Sufficiency tool](#), OHS expects to release the Healthcare Affordability Index in the near future to provide greater clarity for healthcare consumers about their options. This work complements [HealthscoreCT](#), a tool developed by OHS in collaboration with UConn Health to provide consumers with insight about health providers' quality and cost.
- Pursuant to Conn. Gen. Stat. § 17b-59d, the Health Information Exchange was incorporated as the [Health Information Alliance, Inc.](#), to continue OHS' ongoing efforts to develop a statewide HIE, which will facilitate more efficient care coordination, provide greater access for patients and their providers to their health records, minimize avoidable redundancies and more. OHS provides administrative oversight of and support for the HIE and works in coordination with the Department of Social Services to manage federal grant funds for the HIE and other HIT initiatives. One such initiative is the [Medication Reconciliation & Polypharmacy Committee](#), reconvened as a standing committee of the Health IT Advisory Committee, which during 2020, completed its recommendations for the development of patient-centric best practices for consumer medication management, supported by federal grant funds.
- Finally, OHS continues to build on its efforts to promote robust consumer engagement across Connecticut to understand the diverse needs of our communities and help us maintain the partnerships that inform our work. OHS hosts a Consumer Advisory Council (CAC) to engage consumers in our work to promote, engage, and foster positive health outcomes and health equity in our state. The CAC began 2020 actively engaging consumers, holding two listening sessions focused on health equity and access. Despite a lengthy interruption of these outreach activities due to COVID-19, the CAC recently held a community listening session focused on issues facing LGBTQ+ youth that drew nearly 1,000 participants.

Thank you for this opportunity to discuss the Governor's proposed FY 2022-2023 budget for the Office of Health Strategy. I would be happy to answer any questions.