

## Boston's Community Choice Electricity Program: Addressing Climate Change, Public Health, and Equity



### Overview

In February 2021, after two years of development through Working Group meetings and facilitated by city staff and consultants, Boston, MA launched the state's largest municipal electricity aggregation program – Community Choice Electricity (CCE).<sup>1,2</sup> Municipal Aggregation is a process authorized under Massachusetts Law allowing local government to combine the purchasing power of its residents and businesses to negotiate favorable electricity supply contracts on behalf of participants.<sup>3</sup> Boston's plan focuses on the dual goals of stable affordability and increased percentage of renewable electricity provided through the purchasing of Massachusetts Class I Renewable Energy Certificates. As of March 2021, about 200,800 Boston accounts are enrolled in the program, with an opt-out rate of only 7%. The Working Group includes local experts, advocates, community leaders, and residents who have helped shape the CCE Program. The Boston Public Health Commission (BPHC) participated in this stakeholder process and provided outreach support for the recent launch of the program, demonstrating how local health departments can work with other city agencies to achieve climate change public health benefits through programs and policies not traditionally considered public health.

Communities around the globe are experiencing health impacts from climate change that will increase if greenhouse gas emissions are not reduced.<sup>4,5,6,7</sup> The National Association of County and City Health Officials and over two dozen organizations recently released a declaration on climate change and health calling for urgent action.<sup>8</sup> This declaration also recognized that those who have historically borne the burden of environmental injustice are more likely to experience adverse effects of climate change and less likely to benefit from access to adaptive resources.<sup>9,10,11,12,13</sup>

In New England, climate change concerns, already in action, include more frequent and severe storms (both summer and winter), sea level rise and flooding, periods of extreme heat and cold, increased risk of vector-borne illness, economic impacts from changes to fisheries and tourism (skiing, foliage, etc.), and food insecurity (as climate change impacts the nation's agricultural areas).<sup>14,15,16</sup> These impacts play out locally as higher asthma rates, poorer air quality, morbidity and mortality from heat waves, flooding and mold growth in homes, and

CCE is explicitly intended to play a role in climate change mitigation and adaptation, help reduce public health impacts, and address issues of equity and environmental justice.

Through the stakeholder process, six guiding principles were established for the program:

- Strengthen Consumer Protection
- Offer Affordable and Stable Electric Rates
- Reduce Carbon Emissions
- Increase the Share of Renewable Energy on the Grid
- Support Local Renewable Energy
- Commit to Environmental Justice

increased cases of vector-borne illness such as West Nile Virus and Eastern Equine Encephalitis.<sup>17</sup>

The program offers three supply options, two are currently less expensive than the utility company's basic service. Residents and small businesses are automatically enrolled in the middle Standard-Default tier (28% renewable energy), providing small savings compared to the utility company's basic service. Members have the option to opt-out to the utility basic service, step down to a less expensive Optional Basic tier (18% renewable energy) that may be helpful for Bostonians struggling financially, or step up to the Green 100 tier for 100% renewable energy at an increased cost ([see figure](#)). The program also protects Bostonians from the predatory practices of for-profit competitive electric suppliers.

The Working Group and BPHC's hope are that CCE will reduce the city's contribution to global climate change, improve local air quality by supporting renewables, build the renewable energy economy for more local jobs, and provide economic savings and protections for Boston's most vulnerable residents. The CCE advances the Mayor's vision of a healthy, resilient, and equitable future for all Bostonians and is a key milestone in achieving the city's goal of carbon neutrality by 2050.<sup>18</sup>

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For more information, visit: [www.naccho.org/programs/environmental-health/hazards/climate-change](https://www.naccho.org/programs/environmental-health/hazards/climate-change).

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