

Role of Philanthropy

- **Contribute to funds** like RIP Medical Debt and the Medical Debt Freedom Fund or help adopt similar programs in their community to directly relieve the medical debt burden on individuals. For many funders, canceling the debt can be the most impactful way to provide immediate relief to those burdened by medical debt. This opportunity relieves the burden of medical debt for many people and offers a significant return on investment. Interested funders can approach this with a racial equity lens, working with specific communities to target their investment and impact those disproportionately burdened by debt.
- **Contribute to or support and expand community access to innovations in debt litigation processes** like the Hamilton program and FairShake to test new policies, procedures, and technologies to reform debt litigation. Funders can also support the development of more innovative programs and underwrite critical program evaluation research to track outcomes, strengthen program design, and signal what is impactful and effective to scale.

Conclusion

Medical debt is a product of our health care system's design that puts a significant burden of the cost of receiving care on the shoulders of households. While avoiding medical care can be detrimental to one's health, seeking care in our country can be harmful to one's financial security. Health care, and equitable access to it, should be a fundamental right that doesn't require people to choose between their health and finances.

The problem of medical debt is endemic to the U.S., though communities of color and the South are disproportionately impacted by it. Households of color are more affected by the prevalence and burden of medical debt, often intersecting with other comorbidities in their lives. And while systemic change is required to fix our health care system to alleviate

this burden on households, there are solutions needed now and a role for philanthropy to play throughout the lifecycle of medical debt to ensure and protect the financial security of households. We aim for nothing less than a society where no one is burdened by medical debt and where the amounts of medical debt are reduced or eliminated completely.