Massachusetts Public Health Association  
Working for a Healthy Massachusetts  

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This year, MPHA combined major organizational growth and development with strong success in advancing our policy objectives.

It was a year of transition. Dede Ketover served as Interim Executive Director. Ruth Ellen Fitch assumed the Board Presidency after Harold Cox finished John Auerbach’s term as Board President when the latter was appointed Commissioner of the Department of Public Health.

One highlight, of course, was hiring MPHA’s new Executive Director, Valerie Bassett. Valerie brings a longtime commitment to and proven track record in public health advocacy and education. The board and staff look forward to even greater successes under her leadership.

This year, MPHA held both its most successful annual meeting and spring fundraiser. We significantly boosted our visibility through events and media across the state. And we strengthened the collective voice for public health through community organizing and statewide coalition building.

Because of MPHA’s work this past year, Massachusetts children are healthier, our communities are safer and our environment is cleaner. That work – and your vital support and involvement – are all the more urgent as the financial climate changes for the worse. Amidst so much uncertainty, the need for advancing the public health agenda has never been clearer or more necessary.

MPHA’s key accomplishments this year include:

- Helping lead advocacy that boosted Department of Public Health funding by $30 million;
- Winning unanimous passage of the Safer Alternatives Bill in the Senate as a leader of the Alliance for a Healthy Tomorrow;
- Conducting statewide education and advocacy in support of expanding access to healthy food;
- Helping pass a major corporate tax reform bill, closing loopholes and generating millions of dollars in much-needed revenue;
- Playing a leadership role in two new initiatives to promote workforce development for Community Health Workers.
MPHA combined coalition leadership, community organizing, and State House advocacy to help boost funding for health promotion and disease prevention in the Fiscal Year 2009 budget.

In what experts called an “austerity budget,” there was some good news for public health: over $592 million for the Department of Public Health, a $30 million increase over available funding for FY08. MPHA was also active in winning passage of legislation to close corporate tax loopholes, generating millions of dollars in much-needed state revenue.

MPHA continued to be an important link in statewide coalitions. This year, MPHA coordinated the School Health Collaborative, which advocates for funding for school nursing and school-based health centers. MPHA helped launch the Friends of the State Laboratory, a new coalition whose mission is to advocate on behalf of the state laboratory. And MPHA was active in coalitions that won increased funding for youth violence prevention and established a new Office of Health Equity.

MPHA made sure voices for public health were heard from the State House to Springfield. MPHA testified at hearings in Boston, held constituent meetings with legislators in Worcester, and organized public forums in Springfield. MPHA published letters to the editor, mobilized our members on-line and participated in lobby days on Beacon Hill.

And while requesting – and receiving – additional funding for public health, MPHA galvanized support for adequate state revenues. MPHA was active in the Coalition for Tax Fairness, which championed proposals to close unfair corporate tax loopholes. In July, the coalition celebrated victory with passage of legislation that will generate millions of dollars in revenue for health, education, and other programs.
MPHA made significant strides in our work to expand access to healthy, safe and affordable food. MPHA produced great achievements in our organizing and public education efforts, while falling short in passing our legislative priority, the School Nutrition Bill.

MPHA added film screenings to our toolbox this year. In November, MPHA held a screening in Worcester of “Two Angry Moms,” a movie about improving school nutrition, and followed up that successful event with screenings in Northampton and Springfield. The film, both funny and informative, proved to be a great stimulus for discussion and activism.

MPHA’s Food & Nutrition Section also advanced public awareness with several provocative forums. In January, the section held a forum on “Race, Class, and Obesity” at the Roxbury YMCA. Over 100 people participated in this important discussion of disparities. In June, the section held a forum in Waltham on “The High Cost of Healthy Food.” The forum addressed one of the most pressing topics of public concern, with speakers identifying policy options at the state and local level.

MPHA’s annual meeting was another prominent vehicle for advancing the food policy agenda. Over 300 people attended for a discussion of “Safe and Healthy Food: Growing a Massachusetts Food Policy.” The keynote speaker was Frances Moore Lappe, author of “Diet for a Small Planet.” The event also featured a film clip of “King Corn,” introduced by producer Ian Cheney.

MPHA’s hard work on the School Nutrition Bill paid off in moving the bill through two joint committees of the legislature, Public Health and Health Care Financing. Unfortunately, like many bills, it did not advance out of the House Ways & Means Committee. MPHA can be proud, however, of our achievements in generating public support for the bill, including the endorsement of 116 organizations from across the state, thousands

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Thank you, Dede Ketover

MPHA would like to extend a heartfelt thank you to Dede Ketover, who served as MPHA’s Interim Executive Director for the past year.

Dede’s responsibilities included overseeing the hiring of a permanent Executive Director, partnering with MPHA staff to organize a successful spring fundraiser and keeping the organization moving forward during this time of transition.

Dede’s contributions to MPHA have been significant and will undoubtedly be felt for years to come.

The board and staff thank Dede for her unwavering commitment to MPHA’s growth and success.

Welcome, Valerie Bassett

The board and staff welcome Valerie Bassett, who officially joined us on November 3 as MPHA’s new Executive Director.

Valerie brings a longtime commitment to and proven track record in public health advocacy and education with a special focus on promoting health equity and social justice.

Most recently, Valerie served as Director of Policy and Research for the Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts Foundation and is also the former Director of Intergovernmental Relations and Public Health Advocacy for the Boston Public Health Commission.

We welcome Valerie to the organization, and look forward to a bright, productive and exciting future under her leadership.
Other MPHA events over the past year include:

- The film, “Two Angry Moms,” about improving school nutrition, screened in Worcester.
- Forum on “Obesity, Race, and Class,” sponsored by MPHA’s Food and Nutrition Section in Roxbury.
- “Indoor Air Quality Solutions,” a forum sponsored by MPHA’s Environmental & Occupational Health Section.
- Forum on credentialing CHWs in Western Massachusetts.
- Forum entitled, “Immigrants and Health Reform: What Do We Know So Far?”, sponsored by MPHA’s Health Disparities Section.
- Legislative breakfast on closing corporate tax loopholes in Springfield.
- The 19th Annual Elder Care Conference for Western Massachusetts.
- Screening of “Two Angry Moms” in Northampton.
- “The High Cost of Healthy Food: What Can We Do About It?,” a forum sponsored by MPHA’s Food & Nutrition Section in Waltham.
- “Unnatural Causes” film screening in Springfield.
- Legislative breakfast on the new cost containment legislation in Springfield.

MPHA continues its leadership role in the Alliance for a Healthy Tomorrow (AHT), a coalition of health, labor, faith, and environmental organizations focused on preventing exposure to toxic chemicals in our homes, schools, workplaces and the environment. The coalition achieved a major milestone this year with passage of the Safer Alternatives Bill by the Senate. The legislation establishes a pragmatic approach to phasing out dangerous toxic chemicals when safer alternatives are available. The Senate gave its unanimous approval for the bill in January. In the face of vociferous industry opposition, AHT mounted a strong campaign in the House. In May, over half of House members signed a letter to Speaker Sal DiMasi, urging him to bring the bill to a vote. However, time ran out on the bill this session, and it remained in the Ways & Means Committee.

In the process, however, MPHA and our allies raised public awareness and visibility and strengthened our base of support for the bill. We staged
State House media events, generated thousands of postcards and emails to legislators, held local meetings with elected officials, and published numerous letters to the editor, laying the groundwork for next session.

The coalition also promoted other policy initiatives. We advanced a bill requiring safer cleaning products in schools and other facilities through two committees. We continued discussions with the Patrick administration about a “green” purchasing executive order. And we won strong rules on lead in children’s jewelry – which were later withdrawn because of a new federal law preempting state regulation.

MPHA’s Environmental & Occupational Health Section engaged members in both policy advocacy and public education efforts. In March, over 30 people attended a forum sponsored by the section in Cambridge on “Indoor Air Quality Solutions.” MPHA also continued to participate in a project that’s piloting Integrated Pest Management (IPM), a preventative approach to reducing both pests and pesticides, in Boston public housing.

MPHA is helping lead a new effort to expand the role of Community Health Workers (CHWs) in increasing access to care, improving quality, reducing costs and eliminating disparities.

MPHA is a partner of the Community Health Worker Initiative of Boston, which is championing sustainable funding, fair wages and career development opportunities for CHWs.

MPHA co-chairs the initiative’s policy committee along with the Massachusetts Association of Community Health Workers (MACHW). MPHA and its allies are launching a campaign this fall to advance a policy agenda through education, organizing and advocacy.

MPHA is also a member of the Department of Public Health’s Advisory Council on Community Health Workers. In that capacity, we played a key role in boosting the prominence of public health in the media. Last fall, our op-ed piece, “Back to Healthy Schools,” was published in over a dozen newspapers across the state.

In April, AJ Juarez, MPHA’s western MA community organizer, appeared on “Food for Thought,” a North Adams cable access show, talking about school nutrition. We participated in several widely covered State House media events around toxins in products. We were featured in a front page Boston Herald story on food safety. And we scored numerous letters to the editor in support of the School Nutrition Bill, funding for school health services, the Safer Alternatives Bill, and other public health concerns.

MPHA’s Spring Awards Celebration, held in May at The State Room in downtown Boston, was a rousing success. Over 300 people joined us in honoring three public health champions, Commissioner John Auerbach, Frances B. Hubbard and Nancy Turnbull, and raised nearly $270,000.
DPH Advisory Council on Community Health Workers: MPHA is a member of the council, and has led its Research Working Group.

DPH Statewide Obesity Task Force: As a member of the task force, MPHA is contributing to the development of a statewide agenda for preventing obesity.

Massachusetts Association of Community Health Workers: MPHA plays a strong role in guiding the growth and development of this organization.

Massachusetts Commission on Gay and Lesbian Youth: By law, MPHA has two representatives on the commission, which advises on policies and programs for gay and lesbian youth.

Massachusetts Health Care Quality and Cost Council Advisory Committee: By law, MPHA has a representative on the advisory committee, which advises the council on implementing health reform.

Massachusetts Health Disparities Council: By law, MPHA has a representative on the council, which makes recommendations for policies to eliminate health disparities.

Preventing Childhood Obesity: MPHA built a coalition of over 100 organizations across the state in support of improving school nutrition.

Partnership for a Healthy Weight: MPHA is an active member of this statewide network, which devises strategies and shares information on preventing obesity.

Public Health Council: MPHA nominates a member of the council and has a board member on the council, which promulgates DPH regulations, among other responsibilities.

School Health Collaborative: MPHA coordinates this coalition, which champions increased state funding of school health services.

Tobacco Free Massachusetts: MPHA is a member of this coalition, which advocates for policies to prevent cigarette smoking.

MPHA is continuing our successful work to strengthen and diversify the voices for public health across Massachusetts. We’re developing new leadership, forging connections, and linking organizing around local issues with advocacy on our statewide agenda.

In CENTRAL MASSACHUSETTS, MPHA is expanding the network of activists and organizations engaged in food policy. One highlight was a screening of the film “Two Angry Moms” in November. Over 50 people attended to see the story of two mothers advocating for healthier school food.

One of MPHA’s star activists is Jen Moiles, a Worcester public school parent, who helped organize the film screening, spoke at a State House rally on the School Nutrition Bill and arranged a successful district meeting with State Rep. Robert Spellane.

In Upton, we’re working with Martha Pellegrino, a registered dietician at the Blackstone Valley Vocational Technical High School. Martha has helped collect hundreds of our “got lunch?” postcards in support of the School Nutrition Bill from students, teachers and administrators. We also arranged for constituents to meet with State Representative John Fresolo at the State House, prompting him to take action on the bill.
The list of organizations that MPHA is collaborating with continues to grow. The Henry Lee Willis Center, the Center for Living and Working, the Greater Worcester Farmer’s Market, and the Living Earth food market are among the many that helped with outreach on the School Nutrition Bill. And we’ve begun planning with the Worcester Advisory Food Policy Council, the Worcester County Food Bank and the Worcester Partnership to Eliminate Racial and Ethnic Disparities on local initiatives to bring healthy food into the city’s schools and low-income neighborhoods.

MPHA is also engaging central Massachusetts residents in our other priorities, such as funding for school health services and environmental health. Among our notable achievements have been letters in local newspapers. In July, Sandra Ryder published a letter in the Telegram & Gazette in support of school health funding, while in February, Joanne Triestman published a letter in the Community Advocate in support of the Safer Alternatives Bill.

In WESTERN MASSACHUSETTS, MPHA is helping train new activists in the skills of advocacy and organizing, while strengthening our position as a crucial nexus for health policy in the region.

Last December, we helped launch the Leadership Training Institute, a joint project with the Holyoke Food and Fitness Policy Council and Nuestras Raíces. Twenty-five community members participated in the eight-week course, which covered subjects such as media outreach and legislative advocacy.

MPHA continues to organize our quarterly legislative breakfasts. The meetings, which covered subjects such as corporate tax loopholes and the new cost containment legislation, are an important gathering point for community activists and leaders. We also played a key role in organizing several film screenings and forums on topics ranging from school nutrition to health disparities.

This year, we continued our strong collaboration with the Food Bank of Western Massachusetts in support of the School Nutrition Bill. We also engaged many other organizations, such as the Pioneer Valley Health Education Center and the Western Massachusetts Center for Healthy Communities.

MPHA also maintained our important roles in the Community Outreach Workers Network and Training (COWNT) Coalition and the Alliance for a Healthy Tomorrow. The COWNT Coalition, led in partnership with the Pioneer Valley Area Health Education Center (AHEC), a program of the City of Springfield, sponsored a series of trainings covering topics such as advocacy, caretaker burnout, CHW safety, and homelessness prevention. And, working with the Alliance for a Health Tomorrow, we organized meetings with legislators in support of the Safer Alternatives Bill.

As the ‘umbrella organization’ for public health in Massachusetts, coalition work is key to MPHA’s successes. We lead, support and participate in a number of coalitions, as well as serve on several state commissions and task forces.

**ACT! Coalition:** MPHA is a member of this coalition, which advocates for successful implementation of the state’s health reform law.

**American Public Health Association:** MPHA is an affiliate of APHA, the nation’s largest organization of health professionals.

**Alliance for a Healthy Tomorrow:** MPHA plays a leading role in this coalition of labor, health, faith and environmental organizations, which advocates for policies to prevent exposure to toxic chemicals.

**Community Health Worker Initiative of Boston:** MPHA co-chairs the Policy Committee of the initiative.

**COWNT (Community Outreach Worker Networking & Training) Coalition:** MPHA co-chairs this network of CHWs in western MA.

**Coalition for Local Public Health:** MPHA is active in this five-member coalition of local public health organizations.

**Coalition for Tax Fairness:** MPHA played an active part in this coalition, which successfully championed closure of corporate tax loopholes.