



For immediate release

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Trust in Public Health, Science, and Equity themes at MPHA 23rd Annual Spring Awards Breakfast

Over 300 guests gathered for the Massachusetts Public Health Alliance (MPHA) 2025 Spring Awards Breakfast on June 6, 2025, at the Artists for Humanity EpiCenter in Boston and raised \$130,000 to support its advocacy and alliance building work to create a healthier, more equitable future for all. Tpecial thanks to our Platinum Plus Sponsor, Boston Children's Hospital, and the many sponsors and donors who made the event a success. The room broke into applause as MPHA laid out its vision for a movement for bold structural change so that individuals, families, and communities in Massachusetts regardless of race, ethnicity, wealth, or zip code have all the tools and resources they need to thrive.

Roeshana Moore-Evans, MPHA Board President, emphasized why this annual gathering had even greater meaning this year. “We gathered to reconnect with colleagues and allies, to celebrate our victories, to acknowledge this year's public health champion awardees, and to find strength in one another during these harrowing times when public health is facing intentional threats. The energy, excitement, and power in the room demonstrated our shared goals of greater racial justice and health equity, and will fuel the strategic, committed partnerships that we need to weather this storm and even make continued progress.”

This year’s four MPHA award recipients were:

- **Grace Sterling Stowell, MSW**, Executive Director of BAGLY – *Paul Revere Award*
- **Shari Nethersole, M.D.**, Vice President for Community Health and Engagement at Boston Children’s – *Augustus Hinton Award for Public Health Leadership in Medicine*
- **Cheryl Sbarra, J.D.**, Executive Director and Senior Staff Attorney at the Massachusetts Association of Health Boards – *Lemuel Shattuck Award*
- **Victoria Selser**, Epidemiologist with the City of Fitchburg Health Department – *Local Public Health Leadership Award*

Cheryl Bartlett, CEO, New Bedford Community Health, Lemuel Shattuck Awardee (2018), and **Harold Cox**, Professor of the Practice in Community Health Sciences, Boston University School of Public Health, Paul Revere Awardee (2010) served as the event's Co-Chairs. In thanking all the sponsors and attendees, they noted, "This is the third year in a row this event has sold out as it is a unique opportunity for the public health community to gather together and hear up-to-the minute thinking about what is happening with respect to public health across the Commonwealth."

Massachusetts Department of Public Health Commissioner Dr. Robbie Goldstein provided remarks about the state of public health. Goldstein started by thanking everyone in the room for choosing to serve the public, to do good, before addressing this pivotal moment in time "for public health, for our country, for our future, for democracy, and for truth."

To demonstrate his point that "**public health is not just about science, it's an act of patriotism,**" Commissioner Goldstein recounted that Paul Revere was the country's first public health officer and President George Washington let "science, courage and conviction" lead his decision to inoculate the entire Continental Army against smallpox.

Indeed, it was Onesimus, an enslaved Black man from West Africa, who first shared the long-practiced technique of variolation (a form of inoculation) in response to a 1721 outbreak of smallpox in the Massachusetts colony.

MPHA bestowed its highest honor, the Paul Revere Award, to [Grace Sterling Stowell](#), best known as the Executive Director of the Boston Alliance of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Youth (BAGLY), one of the oldest and largest LGBTQ youth organizations in the nation. Grace has also founded other local and national LGBTQ youth advocacy organizations and shares her knowledge and expertise on several government committees and non-profit boards.

In her acceptance speech, Grace said, "We have much to celebrate, especially during this Pride month, and yet we are experiencing some of the most challenging and terrifying - while not entirely unprecedented - attacks from the highest levels of federal government to roll back decades of hard-won progress. This is a scary time to be visible, whether we choose to be or not, especially among youth who are the most vulnerable. I know many of these challenges of visibility and want to share a few lessons I've learned along the way. Finding community among others like us and fighting for collective liberation is the only way for all our communities to move forward. And this is also good public health!"

Dr. Shari Nethersole, Vice President for Community Health and Engagement at Boston Children's, was presented with the newly named Augustus Hinton Award for Public Health Leadership in Medicine "for extraordinary commitment to bringing public health principles and partnerships into the practice of medicine, combining the clinical and public health side of the equation in their delivery of services or programs."

In her acceptance speech, Dr. Nethersole said, "In spite of current challenges, we must acknowledge the significant progress in our improved health and life trajectories made possible by adopting a public health approach. I am heartened because young children today know more about their health and their bodies and how they work than kids 30 years ago. They also know what makes communities healthier and are willing to contribute to making them so!"

Victoria Selser, Epidemiologist with the City of Fitchburg Health Department and the Montachusett Public Health Network, received the Local Public Health Leadership Award for her innovative, determined, and collaborative efforts to address critical gaps in access to care and prevention services in local communities.

In accepting the award, Victoria said, "Once you see the realities of inequity, you cannot turn your back to them. Through early experiences with COVID tracing, I learned the power of solidarity, compassion, and a collective willingness to tackle what seem insurmountable challenges. Let's continue to serve with purpose, act with courage and lead with compassion.

Cheryl Sbarra, Executive Director and Senior Staff Attorney at the Massachusetts Association of Health Boards (MAHB), was this year's Lemuel Shattuck Award for her extraordinary contributions to the advancement of public health practice in New England on issues ranging from tobacco, chronic diseases, opioids and more.

In her acceptance remarks, Cheryl said, "The Tobacco Industry's legal challenges have been numerous, and our victories against them remarkable. Every time the industry challenges us in court, we win; and when we win, we strengthen the legal authority of boards of health and the legal authority of the Department of Public Health to protect the health of Massachusetts' residents."

"This year's awardees exemplify the power of partnerships to bridge policy and practice with values of equity, fairness, and community," remarked **Carlene Pavlos**, MPHA Executive Director. "Grace, Shari, Victoria, and Cheryl each offer shining examples of what is possible when we center those most impacted by health inequities. Each one inspired us with their integrity, vision, and deep love for their communities."

As an alliance, MPHA remains determined to advance public health and sees our resistance in collective terms. Carlene noted, “It was a beautiful morning—everything our hearts and spirits needed. A time to reconnect, to feel joy, and to be reminded of the power we hold when we come together for health, justice, and community.”

Full descriptions of each awardee can be found at: <https://mapublichealth.org/2025-spring-awards-breakfast-awardees/>.

ABOUT MPHA

The Massachusetts Public Health Alliance (MPHA) is a nonprofit organization that promotes a healthy Massachusetts through advocacy, community organizing, and coalition building. We are leaders in the movement to create health equity by addressing the root causes of health and wellness. We promote policies that impact the major drivers of health outcomes, such as access to healthy food, safe affordable housing, and transportation. We also advocate for equitable public health services throughout the Commonwealth. To learn more, visit www.mapublichealth.org.