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Public Health Leaders Call for Generational Investment of Federal Funds to Transform Inefficient & Inequitable Local Health System

After Nearly 18,000 COVID Deaths, Leaders Demand “No More Band-Aids”

Boston, MA – Today, public health leaders, elected officials, and local public health professionals gathered on the State House steps to call for the transformation of the Commonwealth’s inefficient and inequitable local public health system. The Coalition for Local Public Health and the Massachusetts Public Health Association announced their [proposal to allocate \\$250.9M](#) in federal dollars from the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 over the next five years to build local public health capacity, upgrade data systems, and support workforce development.

“We have known for decades that the local public health system in Massachusetts was inadequate,” said Cheryl Sbarra, Executive Director of the Massachusetts Association of Health Boards. “We will not accept any more Band-Aids on a broken system. What we need now is transformational investment.”

“Thanks to the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021, we have a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to create a 21st century local public health system,” said State Senator Jason Lewis. “It’s essential that we take the lessons learned from the devastation of COVID and use these funds to create a stronger, more equitable system for the future.”

“Our local Boards of Health have been critical in providing leadership, resources and information to residents throughout the COVID-19 pandemic,” said State Representative Denise Garlick. “The response demonstrated the resiliency of the people who serve on our local Boards of Health, and as we emerge from this public health crisis we must ensure the continued strength and equity of public health services to all of our residents.”

“Failing to act now is acceptance of the status quo. But, if we come together, at this time of unprecedented opportunity, we can create a public health system that is truly effective and equitable for the residents of every city and town in the Commonwealth,” said Craig Andrade, Associate Dean for Practice at the BU School of Public Health & a member of the Brockton Board of Health.

“Every Massachusetts resident deserves strong public health protections, regardless of their race, income or zip code,” said Carlene Pavlos, Executive Director of the Massachusetts Public Health Association. “The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the weaknesses in our local public health system, and we must take action today to build a system that Massachusetts can be proud of.”

Other speakers included Damōn Chaplin, Director of the City of New Bedford’s Department of Public Health, and Ruth Mori, President of the Massachusetts Association of Public Health Nurses.

Massachusetts is one of the only states in the nation with no dedicated funding directed to local public health. After decades of underinvestment, the funding necessary to transform the Commonwealth's local public health system is substantial. The state's budget for the last two fiscal years, passed by the Legislature and signed by Governor Baker, has included new investments in the local public health system. While this state investment is crucial, the dollars invested over the last two years fall far short of what is needed for a system-wide transformation.

The [proposed investments of American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 funds](#) announced today align with the 2019 recommendations of the Special Commission on Local and Regional Public Health and are informed by the Coalition for Local Public Health and the Statewide Accelerated Public Health for Every Community Coalition (SAPHE 2.0 Coalition), representing thousands of frontline public health workers, municipal leaders, and allied partners from health care and numerous other sectors.

The budget proposal seeks an investment of \$250.9M over 5 years in three categories:

1. \$95M: Infrastructure Investments to Address Health Disparities

Many Massachusetts cities and towns are unable to meet statutory requirements and lack the capacity to meet rigorous national public health standards. This funding will allow cities, towns, and health districts to improve their infrastructure and increase their staff capacity in order to meet existing requirements. Funding will also allow local boards of health to increase the number and scope of comprehensive public health districts, formal shared services agreements, and other arrangements for sharing public health services, improving the overall effectiveness and efficiency of the Massachusetts local public health system.

2. \$37.5M: Workforce Development & Training

The 2019 [Blueprint for Public Health Excellence](#) of the Special Commission on Local and Regional Public Health recommended a set of workforce education and credentialing standards for implementation in Massachusetts as a first step in ensuring an adequately educated workforce that is capable of dealing with a 21st-century public health landscape. In order to achieve the recommended credentialed workforce, ongoing and robust training and educational opportunities must be provided across the state.

3. \$118.4M: Enhancement of Public Health Data Systems

Because Massachusetts lacks a comprehensive system to collect local public health data, there is limited capacity to measure system performance and to use data for local public health planning purposes. Aligned with the recommendations of the Special Commission, this funding would improve state and local public health departments' planning and system accountability by creating a standardized, integrated, and unified public health reporting system; and strengthening the DPH, Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), and local public health capacity to collect, analyze, and share data.

The Massachusetts Public Health Association (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. ###

Note to editors: images of the event are available upon request