



# **INTERIM POLICY REPORT**

# **2025**



[WWW.MAINEPUBLICHEALTH.ORG](http://WWW.MAINEPUBLICHEALTH.ORG)

# Introduction

**We are committed to advancing evidence-based policies that protect and promote public health for all people in Maine.**

MPHA has been working overtime on behalf of public health in Augusta and in Washington D.C., countering fresh threats to core public health infrastructure and finding opportunities to make progress. We are fiercely nonpartisan, and we advocate for policies that improve health and stand up against policies that harm it.

In Augusta, we influenced more than 70 pieces of legislation across a wide range of public health issues, and continued our leadership on statewide coalitions and working groups. We had notable wins on tobacco policy, including increasing the state's tobacco excise tax for the first time in 20 years, protecting public health funding in the Fund for a Healthy Maine, and establishing a grant program for Mainers to guard their homes against extreme weather events.

We also bolstered our federal advocacy efforts, strengthened our relationships with Maine's Members of Congress, and took on a leadership role coordinating a coalition of public health associations across the country to protect national programs that matter to local communities.

Each week since the start of the Maine legislative session, we sent an advocacy update, which had a consistent open rate of 80%. Thank you to our members who contacted their elected officials; especially those that went above and beyond to help us secure historic wins on tobacco policies, shore up public health funding, and promote cannabis safety. You helped make good public health work happen!

Below, I have included our board-approved policy priorities (state and federal), as well as highlights of our work so far in 2025.

Thank you for supporting our work.

In solidarity,  
Becca Boulos, PhD, MPH  
MPHA Executive Director



# State Policy Priorities



We have 6 policy priorities for the 132nd legislature.

As a statewide public health organization, MPHA advocates for a wide-range of issues that impact people and places in Maine. While we will advance or oppose legislation in other areas, these are our 6 priorities for the 132nd legislature.



## PUBLIC HEALTH FUNDING

Ensure funds from the Tobacco Master Settlement Agreement are used for tobacco prevention and control, and that public health programs and workforce are sustainably and consistently funded.

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## BOLSTER LOCAL PUBLIC HEALTH EFFORTS

Expand the membership and scope of local boards of health so they can respond to the pressing health needs of today and be a resource for their communities.

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## WABANAKI SELF-DETERMINATION

Advance policies that recognize and reinforce Wabanaki Nations' inherent Sovereignty.

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## REDUCE TOBACCO BURDEN AND HARM IN MAINE

Increase the tobacco tax to prevent youth use, fund treatment programs, and lower cancer rates. Shift the cost of tobacco waste disposal from Maine taxpayers to the tobacco industry.

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## ENSURE TRANSPARENCY IN THE MEDICAL CANNABIS PROGRAM

Adopt a test, track and trace system to ensure a safer, more transparent medical cannabis program.

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## PROMOTE SAFER HOUSING

Update landlord-tenant regulations to promote safer housing, fund home repairs, and establish a stakeholder group to recommend policy solutions to Maine's housing crisis.

# Federal Policy Priorities



We have 4 federal  
policy priorities.

As a statewide public health organization, MPHA advocates for a wide-range of issues that impact people and places in Maine. Our federal priorities have direct impacts on Maine communities.



## PUBLIC HEALTH FUNDING

Ensure public health programs are sustainably and consistently funded, and that evaluation data are collected and meaningful to inform programming.

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## PUBLIC HEALTH WORKFORCE

Ensure public health programs are sustainably and consistently staffed, and that staff positions align with their expertise. Advance policies that encourage workforce development.

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## PUBLIC HEALTH AUTHORITY

Advance policies that recognize and reinforce public health authority, with a particular focus on US FDA and CDC.

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## HEALTHCARE ACCESS

Ensure fair access to quality, affordable healthcare, particularly for rural residents, including access to gender-affirming and reproductive healthcare.

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# State Public Health Wins

## WE WON ON 4 OF 6 OF OUR STATE PUBLIC HEALTH PRIORITIES.

### ***Reducing tobacco burden and harm***

Increased the tobacco tax by \$1.50 per pack of cigarettes, with a proportional increase to other tobacco products. This policy - the first tobacco tax increase in 20 years - will reduce youth tobacco use and encourage current smokers to quit.

We also closed longstanding loopholes in tobacco regulations, including indoor smoking in motels and pharmacy retail sales.

### ***Protecting public health funding***

Protected funding for public health programs included in the Fund for a Healthy Maine, and ensured full funding for the state's tobacco program.

### ***Supporting local public health***

Updated the state's statute regulating local Boards of Health; they can now be more responsive to community needs.

### ***Promoting safer housing***

Supported LD 1 - bipartisan legislation that will help make Mainers' homes more resilient to extreme weather events.



### ***Notable policy priority delays:***

#### ***Safer Medical Cannabis***

We defeated or weakened bad cannabis policies, but were unable to make progress on medical cannabis regulation. Our priority bill, which would require testing and tracking of medical cannabis, has been carried over to next session. We will continue work on this over the summer.

#### ***Wabanaki Self-Determination***

Most Wabanaki Alliance policy priorities were carried over.



A photograph of the U.S. Capitol building in Washington, D.C., featuring its iconic dome and classical columns under a blue sky with scattered white clouds.

# National Leadership

## ***Coordinating other state public health associations***

As a state affiliate of the American Public Health Association, we are connected to the 50+ other public health associations and alliances across the country. This year, with the onslaught of significant cuts to federal public health infrastructure, MPHA stepped in to fill a critical gap by convening and coordinating federal strategy, messaging and grassroots/grasstops advocacy with the other states. We prepared a sign-on letter, focused on FY25 and FY26 spending, signed by 60 organizations (30 in-state and 30 out-of-state) and shared that with our delegation, as well as with senators from across the country. This coordinated approach allows us to make a bigger impact in Washington D.C. and is the first time the state associations were coordinated on federal policy work.

We also advocated for our Members of Congress to oppose the Reconciliation Bill. While the bill passed, all 4 members of Maine's delegation opposed it, and several harmful provisions were removed.

Through Becca's leadership position as Chair of the APHA Action Board, she has overseen efforts to increase advocacy engagement of APHA's 25,000+ members, including helping to organize a national webinar about the various funding bills in Congress and a drumbeat of weekly engagement from APHA's 30+ professional sections.

We have continued to strengthen relationships with Maine's Members of Congress, and will continue to work with other states to protect public health infrastructure and authority across the U.S.

***"Becca & Matt, the letter your group wrote & we signed & sent to the staffers from our state's office was great. It resulted in us receiving [a meeting] for next week. We didn't have a relationship with the office before your letter. Your work, and teamwork, make a positive difference!"***

***-Merry Grande, MN Public Health Assn.***



# Raising Visibility for Public Health



This year, Matt's taking Healthy Maine Talks on the road for some "In the Field" episodes, hearing from folks in Maine about why they love public health, and how federal funding cuts impact their communities.

## ***Maine vaccine skeptics are embracing RFK Jr.***

***Bangor Daily News 2/5/25***

"Despite his statements about making America healthy, Robert Kennedy Jr.'s spread of vaccine misinformation .. and general inability to apply science to policy are deeply concerning,"  
-Rebecca Boulos

## ***Opinion: Federal funding uncertainty hurts Mainers*** ***Bangor Daily News 2/3/25***

"The bottom line is that many of the Maine-based organizations that we know and love, and which provide foundational support for our health, rely on federal funding. Doing away with it puts our physical, mental, and financial health at risk," -Rebecca Boulos

## ***Maine public health advocates decry Trump administration's decision to cut off CDC funding*** ***Maine Public Radio 3/27/25***

"Wellington compared the importance of the funding to taking care of a house. 'When you have a major storm and discover a bunch of leaks in your roof, you're going to want to fix those leaks before the next storm,'"

## ***Proposal to increase Maine's cigarette tax draws praise and concern***

***Portland Press Herald 1/17/25***

"Raising the tobacco tax reduces youth tobacco use and helps ensure that the next generation grows up free from tobacco addiction and harm. It's a long overdue step."-Matt Wellington



# Coalitions and Partnerships



One of MPHA's biggest strengths is our diverse network of partners. Here are some highlights from our coalition work this year:

## **The Alliance for Responsible Cannabis in Maine (ARC-ME)**

In 2024, MPHA established ARC-ME, a new multi-sector coalition working to prevent youth cannabis use, protect patient health, and ensure safety, accountability and transparency in the cannabis industry. The coalition grew to include more than a dozen groups this year.

## **Environmental Priorities Coalition**

We were proud to be appointed to the steering committee of the Environmental Priorities Coalition last year. The EPC is a cross-sector coalition of nearly 40 organizations that align efforts each legislative session to pass policies that will conserve the environment, combat climate change, and improve environmental health.

## **Wabanaki Alliance**

The Wabanaki Alliance is a coalition of more than 200 organizations, businesses, and other stakeholders in support of recognizing Wabanaki sovereignty. This year, we worked alongside the Wabanaki Alliance to lift up their message in the media, as well as in the halls of Augusta.

## **Public Health for the Win**

In 2025, MPHA started convening the other state public health associations interested in federal advocacy. We meet biweekly to plan strategy, communications, outreach, and messaging.



*Katelyn Michaud from Maine Cancer Foundation speaks alongside bi-partisan legislators at our April press event launching MPHA's new cancer prevention policy toolkit, "Reducing Maine's Cancer Burden."*



A monarch butterfly with orange and black wings is perched on a pink flower with yellow centers. The background is a soft, out-of-focus green.

# State & National Representation

MPHA staff serve in leadership positions on multiple boards, working groups, and coalitions, representing our members and the public health perspective in governmental, non-governmental, and multi-sector groups in Maine and nationally.

## **National**

- Becca Boulos, MPHA Executive Director - Chair, American Public Health Association Action Board, Co-Chair APHA Joint Policy Committee & Ex-Officio Member, APHA Executive Board

## **State**

- Matt Wellington, MPHA Associate Director - Steering Committee, Environmental Priorities Coalition
- Becca Boulos - Co-Chair, Maine Climate Council's Community Resilience Working Group
- Becca Boulos - Member, Maine Climate Council's Equity Subcommittee
- Becca Boulos - Co-Chair, PFAS Fund Advisory Committee, Health Subcommittee
- Becca Boulos - Member, PFAS Fund Advisory Committee



# Next Steps

## Where do we go from here?

We continue to be focused on protecting public health funding and workforce in Maine, particularly in light of federal funding changes. We are leading work over the summer with stakeholders on medical cannabis policy and will continue to work with legislators on efforts to reduce environmental waste from tobacco products.

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#### **Sustaining Coalition Participation**

We will continue leading the Alliance for Responsible Cannabis in Maine and our federal advocacy coalition, “Public Health for the Win.” We’ll also maintain our participation in several other statewide coalitions.

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#### **State House & DC Advocacy**

We will continue working in Augusta and in DC to protect public health. We will organize State House Advocacy Days and In-District meetings with federal delegation staff, connecting constituents with their elected officials.

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#### **Engaging Members**

We commit to continuing our regular member communications, educational opportunities, and legislator outreach. That includes building up our Policy Ambassador group, which helped move MPHA policies forward this year.





# Acknowledgments

We would like to thank the following foundations for supporting our advocacy and education efforts: Maine Health Access Foundation, The Bingham Program, Maine Cancer Foundation, Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, and the Betterment Fund.

We also would like to thank the 70+ partners that MPHA works with statewide on public health policies, including the Wabanaki Alliance, Environmental Priorities Coalition, ERA for All Coalition, Maine Paid Leave Coalition, Maine Gun Safety Coalition, and many others.

**We thank you for  
your continued  
support of our efforts  
to advance the  
health of all people  
and places in Maine**

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## Contact

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