

MAINE PUBLIC
HEALTH
ASSOCIATION

20
26

132ND
LEGISLATURE
POLICY
REPORT

Introduction

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

MPHA has been working overtime on behalf of public health in Augusta and 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 community-informed, evidence-based public policies that improve health.

During the 132nd Legislature (2025-2026), we influenced 100+ bills 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 stewardship program for electronic tobacco waste and a grant program for Mainers to guard their homes against extreme weather events.

We also bolstered our federal advocacy efforts and took on a leadership role coordinating a coalition of public health organizations across 35+ states to protect national programs that matter to local communities.

Regularly throughout the session, I sent an advocacy update, which had a consistent open rate of 80% (thank you for reading it!). I also want to thank our members who contacted their elected officials; especially those that went above and beyond to help us secure historic wins on tobacco policies and 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 during the 132nd Legislature.

Thank you for supporting MPHA.

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.



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.



WABANAKI SELF-DETERMINATION

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



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.



ENSURE TRANSPARENCY IN THE MEDICAL CANNABIS PROGRAM

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



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.

State Public Health Wins

WE WON ON 5 OF 6 OF OUR STATE PUBLIC HEALTH PRIORITIES.

Protect Public Health Funding

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

Bolster Local Public Health

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

Wabanaki Self-Determination

As part of the Wabanaki Alliance we made progress toward the full recognition of Wabanaki Self-Determination through bills that improve tax laws and explore how to make federal benefits more readily accessible to tribes in Maine.

Reduce Tobacco Burden and Harm

Increased the tobacco tax by \$1.50 - the first increase in 20 years. We also established a stewardship program for electronic tobacco waste, and closed longstanding loopholes in tobacco regulations, including indoor smoking in motels and pharmacy retail sales.



Promote Safer Housing

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

Safer Medical Cannabis

We defeated or weakened bad cannabis policies, but were unable to make progress on proactive medical cannabis regulation. We will continue to work on this public health issue.

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.



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.



PUBLIC HEALTH AUTHORITY

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



HEALTHCARE ACCESS

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



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, focusing on FY25 and FY26 spending, signed by 60 organizations (30 in-state and 30 out-of-state) and shared that with our Congressional 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 marks the first time the state associations have coordinated on federal policy work.

We also advocated for our Members of Congress to oppose the Reconciliation Bill (HR 1). While the bill ultimately 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 oversaw 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, Minnesota Public Health Assn.

Federal Public Health Wins

PROTECTED PUBLIC HEALTH FUNDING IN FY 26 BUDGET

The Trump Administration proposed a 50% cut to the U.S. CDC's budget in FY26, something that would have had far reaching consequences, especially in Maine.

The U.S. CDC distributes 80% of its funding to state and local health departments, and non-governmental health partners working to reduce substance use, encourage healthy eating & active living, and support infrastructure that helps states fight infectious disease outbreaks.

Through the Healthy States Collaborative, which has grown to 35+ state partners, representing every region of the country, we helped prevent many of these reckless funding cuts. We helped facilitate Hill meetings with public health professionals here in Maine and across the country and raised visibility in the media about the on the ground impact of federal policy decisions.



MPHA members, Hannah Siladi (2025 MPHA Policy Ambassador), Isaac Benowitz and Randy Domina, attend meetings with Maine's federal delegation in Washington D.C.

Our small but mighty group continues to meet biweekly, sharing updates and resources, and a commitment to protecting the federal infrastructure our states and local communities rely on.

Raising Visibility for Public Health



MPHA Associate Director Matt Wellington speaks on a panel at the American Public Health Association conference in Washington D.C. about the Healthy States Collaborative.

Maine health, science experts speak on U.S. EPA cuts impacting communities, WABI--4/22/26

"We rely on federal policy and programs to regulate air quality here in Maine. We want to make sure the EPA reaffirms its mission, which should be to protect the health of all people in the country, and to protect the environment."--Matt Wellington

Maine lawmakers consider medical cannabis testing bill, Spectrum News--2/4/26

"I want folks to know that they can have confidence in the products they are consuming for managing medical conditions and right now they just can't really have that in the medical cannabis program and that's a shame."--Matt Wellington

Maine public health advocates gather in Augusta to recognize National Public Health Week Fox 22--4/6/26

"It really gives us a chance to uplift the hard work that people in public health do every day, oftentimes behind the scenes, the kind of grunt work behind the scenes to help protect our communities."--Rebecca Boulos

Maine Climate Council grapples with affordability Portland Press Herald--3/31/26

"We heard them [listening session attendees], we deliberated really good policy and we passed something that's going to help people shore up their homes, to make them safer, to make them more resilient to climate change," Boulos said. "I think it's imperative we keep doing that."

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.

Healthy States Collaborative

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. It includes 35+ state associations across the country.



Katelyn Michaud from Maine Cancer Foundation speaks alongside bipartisan legislators at our April 2025 press event launching MPHA's new cancer prevention policy toolkit, "Reducing Maine's Cancer Burden."



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 (2025)
- Becca Boulos and Matt Wellington, co-conveners of the Healthy States Collaborative

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
- Becca Boulos - Member, PFAS Fund Health and Wellness Advisory Panel
- Becca Boulos - Member, Working Group to Prioritize Wellness and Mental Health Resources for Heritage Industries



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.

01 _____

Coalition Leadership

We will continue leading our federal advocacy coalition, “Healthy States Collaborative.” We’ll also maintain our participation in several other statewide coalitions.

02 _____

State House & DC Advocacy

We will continue working in Augusta and in DC to protect public health funding, workforce, and authority, including connecting MPHA members with their elected officials through in-district meetings.

03 _____

Engaging Members

We will solicit feedback from MPHA members about policy priorities, and provide regular updates, educational trainings, and hands-on learning opportunities.



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, the Betterment Fund, and the Island Foundation.

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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