



PUBLIC HEALTH AWARD WINNERS 2026

Each year, MPHA recognizes excellence in public health by awarding the following distinctions to organizations and individuals who make a difference in Maine.



To see previous award winners,
please visit:

www.mainepublichealth.org/about/awards



Presidents' Award

**Coastal Enterprises,
Inc.**



Coastal Enterprises

Coastal Enterprises, Inc. has been on the leading edge of Maine's economic sector in recognizing the impact of social drivers of health on the economic prosperity of Maine people. They direct their considerable resources toward many of these challenges through investments, low-interest loans, and thoughtful leadership to meet connected priorities in sectors like housing, childcare, and sustainable agriculture, to name a few. CEI provides affordable financing to many critical community nonprofits such as medical and dental clinics, community centers, food banks and pantries, and transitional housing.

They are a thought leader among community-based financing entities in Maine, and have emphasized the need for increased cross-sector collaboration to address Maine's most pressing health, social, and economic priorities. CEI centers equity in its work by committing to reducing the wealth gap and building a more equitable economy by focusing services on people and communities unable to access financing from traditional sources. CEI continues to positively impact issues that are front and center on Maine's public health agenda through leading and DOING important and innovative work.

Pamela M.B. Studwell Tobacco Policy Award

Kenneth I. Lewis, Jr.



Kenneth has led Maine's Center for Tobacco Independence (CTI) since 2003. Ken's steady leadership all these years has resulted in CTI being one of the best tobacco treatment programs in the country, with a 40% successful quit rate. He also led CTI to establish one of the few youth nicotine treatment programs in the country. Ken's leadership has set CTI apart in tobacco cessation, and as a leader in addressing disparities.

Ken is also a broader public health leader, including on social justice issues, outside of his formal role leading CTI. For instance, he serves as a member of Maine's Permanent Commission on the Status of Racial, Indigenous, and Maine Tribal Populations. He has served on various boards, including on the United Way of Greater Portland, as the Vice President of the Greater Portland NAACP, and on Portland's Police Citizens Review Subcommittee. He is also the long-time pastor of the historic Green Memorial AME Zion Church in Portland. Indeed, Ken's voice has been a strong and steady torch for tobacco, and more broadly, for public health and social justice in Maine for well over 20 years.

Phebe Conrey King Access to Health Care

Dr. Jonnathan Busko



Dr. Jonnathan Busko is a board-certified emergency physician in Maine with decades of experience in rural healthcare, critical access hospitals, and emergency medical services (EMS). Throughout his career, he has demonstrated strong leadership in advancing population health through innovative care delivery models that expand access to both preventive and emergency services.

Dr. Busko currently serves as Medical Director of Care Delivery Transformation and Associate Medical Director of the Emergency Department at St. Joseph Healthcare in Bangor. In these roles, he has led the development of key initiatives, including an emergency department rapid screening and clearance pathway for patients entering residential opioid and alcohol detox programs, as well as a post-overdose follow-up care team for the Greater Bangor region.

Dr. Busko also serves as Senior Medical Advisor of Workforce Development and Rural Health Innovation for Community Care Partnership of Maine. In this role, he has focused on implementing a community paramedicine project that expands the traditional role of EMS to include preventive and primary care services for underserved populations. By strengthening this workforce pipeline and fostering collaboration between EMS and primary care, Dr. Busko is helping build sustainable systems that improve healthcare access across rural Maine.

Public Health Business Champion Award

Taj Indian Cuisine

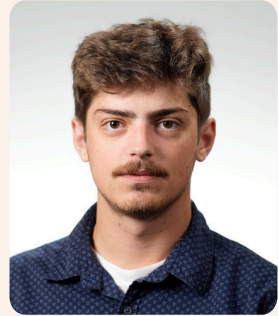


During the COVID-19 pandemic, Taj Indian Cuisine in South Portland started offering free meals to anyone who wanted them - no questions asked. After the pandemic ended, they continued offering free meals, engaging local volunteers to deliver 1,200 meals on Thanksgiving. Last November, Taj expanded upon that and set up a self-serve warming cabinet on the sidewalk in front of their restaurant, providing about 150 meals each day, and even more during the holidays and last fall, after people lost their SNAP benefits.

Taj embodies community leadership, dignity, and compassion in its business practices. Lines are consistently out the door as people dine there because the food is delicious and also because they want to support this community-oriented business, knowing the money they're spending is going to support their food program. In the face of weakening safety net programs and targeting of immigrant-led businesses, Taj hasn't retracted, it has expanded. They deserve recognition for their bravery and commitment to community, and inspiring others by leading by example.

Public Health Journalism Award

Dylan Tusinski



Dylan has covered cannabis policy for the last few years at Portland Press Herald, uncovering some of the most concerning practices in a largely under-regulated industry. His reporting has shed light on a public health problem a lot of people don't know about: the widespread production and distribution of tainted medical cannabis.

Dylan deserves recognition for digging into stories that few reporters have taken on and that desperately need attention. For example, he uncovered details about illicit cannabis grows selling tainted products through the medical market, highlighted lawmakers' conflicts of interest in regulating cannabis, and consistently flags consumer issues associated with cannabis—most recently a story about medical cannabis testing at 18 times the allowable level of mold in the recreational market.

Public Health Policy Champion Award

Representative Anne Graham



Rep. Anne Graham has been a fighter for public health throughout her time in the legislature. She has sponsored bills to expand mental health services, prevent hunger, assist children in state custody, and help people with hearing loss. She has co-sponsored and supported dozens of other bills on subjects as diverse as tobacco and gun safety. She even sponsored a bill to assure that MaineCare would pay for two hearing aids not just one. A public health issue she has not touched is rare.

There are two very important recent bills to highlight. First, Rep. Graham was the sponsor for LD 1847, which proposed that medical cannabis be subject to the same testing and tracking as adult use cannabis. Rep. Graham worked tirelessly with MPHA, the Maine Medical Association, and the general public on the bill. Second, Rep. Graham was the lead sponsor of LD 1658, which would allocate a portion of tobacco tax revenue into the Fund for a Healthy Maine, ensuring alignment between the purpose of a tax and its use. If ever there was a time in Maine history to support and strengthen public health, that time is now, and Rep. Anne Graham answered that call. And in this case, her hard work has been rewarded with success. Rep. Graham is a public health champion who has used every tool to move the public health agenda forward.

Public Health Program of Excellence Award

Downeast Population Health Initiative



*The Community
Caring Collaborative*



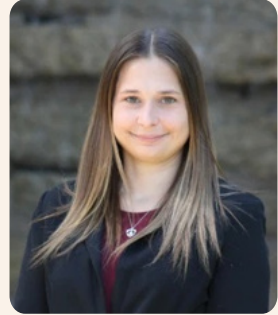
The Connection
Initiative

The Downeast Population Health Initiative (DPHI) has made significant strides in improving the well-being of older adults in Washington County. By utilizing a Community Health Worker approach and the Connection Initiative platform, the program has successfully connected participants with critical resources and support, addressing both practical and emotional needs. One of the most notable outcomes of the program is the increased ability of older adults to access essential resources that directly impact their quality of life.

A hallmark of the DPHI approach is its commitment to follow-up. After participants request help, program staff ensure regular check-ins to monitor progress and address any ongoing concerns. This ongoing engagement has been profoundly meaningful for users, and the sense that someone is invested in their well-being has contributed to improved mental health and greater trust in community services. DPHI's accomplishments extend beyond individual outcomes to broader community impact. The initiative has strengthened partnerships among local organizations, fostering more effective collaboration and communication. Overall, DPHI's outcomes reflect a holistic approach to healthy aging, one that recognizes the importance of both tangible resource provision and emotional connection.

Public Health Rising Star Award

Jessica Schermer



Jessica Schermer is the Program Director for the Maine CDC Prevent Prescription Drug/Opioid Overdose-Related Deaths (PDO) project, which works to reduce fatal and non-fatal overdoses and reduce stigma associated with substance use and substance use disorder. Through this work, Jessica has supported access to lifesaving resources like naloxone and supported evidence-based approaches for overdose prevention. Jessica leads a statewide committee of partners in the PDO project to address the ongoing opioid crisis in the state.

Outside of the stated deliverables in her project, Jessica is committed to supporting creative and meaningful approaches to reducing stigma and breaking down barriers to recovery and support for people with substance use disorders. In her work, Jessica leads with kindness, empathy, and connection to the people she serves. She is a dedicated public servant who puts people, rather than disease and outcomes, at the forefront of her work. To me, this is the hallmark of a public health leader – someone who uses their position and power to lift up communities, individuals, and projects in service of a greater goal. Jessica is truly a rising star in the substance use prevention field in Maine.

Ruth S. Shaper Memorial Award

Denise Delorie



During a public health career in rural Central Maine spanning more than 30 years, Denise has strengthened, advanced, and helped build community health across sectors. Her work reflects a sustained and broad commitment to health promotion and disease prevention that extends far beyond any single professional role, reaching workplaces, schools, nonprofits, and state public health systems. Across her roles, she has demonstrated expertise in project development, implementation, and evaluation, along with a rare ability to convene diverse partners around shared public health goals.

Her leadership extends to the infrastructure that sustains public health in Maine. Denise was the first administrative staff member supporting the Central Public Health District Coordinating Council, has served on numerous public health councils and workgroups, and most recently led the Drug Free Communities initiative in northern Kennebec County. Through these roles, she has helped shape regional and state priorities, ensuring that community voice and evidence-based prevention remain central to policy and strategy. Throughout her career, Denise has bridged community coalitions, workplaces, schools, nonprofits, and state systems. Her sustained, systems-level, and deeply human contributions to public health in Maine make her an exemplary recipient of this award.

Unsung Hero Award

Shasta Newenham



Shasta started a Mobile Medical Unit (MMU) in 2024 from scratch, which was no small feat. She has worked closely with clinical and administrative teams to adapt policies and procedures to the realities of mobile care, carefully balancing flexibility and innovation with clinical best practices and regulatory compliance. She supports a passionate and enthusiastic staff while also ensuring they remain compliant, supported, and able to sustain this critical work over time.

Under Shasta's leadership, the MMU has continued to grow, expanding access to care for individuals who might otherwise go without essential health services. Behind this coordinated and compassionate response is Shasta's steady leadership. Her ability to anticipate challenges, solve problems, and keep the program moving forward has been essential to the success of the MMU. Shasta once described her role to her staff this way: "I'm the person behind the scenes who helps make your work and innovative ideas possible." That statement perfectly captures who she is and the impact she has. Her relentless problem-solving, behind-the-scenes leadership, and commitment to equitable access to care are foundational to the success of Maine Family Planning's Mobile Medical Unit. Quite simply, this program, and our ability to provide care to Maine's most vulnerable citizens, would not be nearly as successful without her.