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Over the past year, public health has been in the headlines almost daily. Pandemic influenza has emerged as a global threat. Presidential politics have influenced state public health policy in several highly publicized cases. Massachusetts has adopted a high profile law designed to expand access to health care.

The Massachusetts Public Health Association (MPHA) has championed prevention, protection, science-based policy making, and justice at every turn. Our members have a lot to be proud about. The strength of our work and the power of our partnerships have helped to ensure that thousands of elders will receive flu shots, pregnant women will face reduced exposure to mercury, more children will receive health services in school, and fewer people will contract AIDS and hepatitis C.

Our membership has grown, and we have strengthened MPHA’s organizing in different regions of the state. MPHA has become a “go to” organization for reporters working on a wide array of health stories. Through grassroots organizing, advocacy, coalition leadership, and public education, MPHA is helping to strengthen the power of public health in Massachusetts. As one of the largest affiliates of the American Public Health Association, we are also helping to strengthen public health nationally.

**MPHA’s Key Accomplishments This Year Include:**

- Led advocacy to boost Department of Public Health funding by $78 million;
- Organized a strong campaign to get soda and junk food out of schools;
- Helped pass legislation to phase out mercury from consumer products;
- Helped pass legislation to prevent transmission of AIDS and hepatitis C;
- Helped pass legislation to promote community health workers;
- Helped win increased funding for local public health planning to prepare for pandemic influenza.
Through a potent combination of grassroots mobilization, coalition work, and advocacy with policy makers, MPHA helped boost the Department of Public Health’s FY07 budget to $513.6 million, an increase of nearly $79 million compared to FY06 and its highest level since FY01. The 18 percent increase included over $40 million in supplemental funding approved for one year, but the FY07 “base” increased by 9 percent compared to FY06.

MPHA led or co-led advocacy for significant increases for school health services (14 percent), immunizations (26 percent), state laboratory services (39 percent), and hepatitis C (151 percent).

We also supported advocacy for major boosts in funding for substance abuse services, tobacco control, cancer screening (breast, prostate, and colorectal), teen pregnancy prevention, and public health hospitals.

Our budget advocacy rests on compelling need, solid information, and engaged members and partners. We testified at hearings, published letters to the editor, and conducted briefings across the state. We met with legislators and mobilized our members with email alerts. We organized a press conference at a Worcester school and co-sponsored a budget breakfast in a Springfield hospital. We worked with dozens of allies through several coalitions for which we provide staff support, including United We Stand for Public Health, the Hepatitis C Coalition, and the Coalition for Local Public Health, issuing regular budget updates and coordinating advocacy efforts.

Even with nearly $170 million restored to DPH since the devastating budget cuts of FY02-03, public health funding, corrected for inflation, still stands 15 percent lower than in FY01. With this year’s state budget balanced using over half a billion dollars in “rainy day” funds, MPHA has already started advocacy for the FY08 public health budget.
MPHA and its advocacy partners scored three significant legislative victories in 2006. With over 5,000 bills filed every session, tireless advocacy and organizing is necessary for a bill to pass. MPHA teamed up with coalition partners and successfully educated the public, engaged our members, and worked with legislators to win the following new laws:

**Mercury Products Bill.**
Passing the Mercury Products Bill was an important achievement for the Alliance for a Healthy Tomorrow, a coalition of health, labor, religious and environmental organizations, of which MPHA is a leading member. The law will phase out the use of mercury in products where alternatives exist and require manufacturers to take back mercury-containing devices.

**Pharmacy Access Bill.**
This law will play a key role in preventing AIDS and hepatitis C by allowing the over-the-counter sale of clean needles to adults without a prescription. Massachusetts joined 47 other states that already had similar policies after public health advocates overwhelmed stubborn opposition by opponents who claimed the measure would encourage drug addiction.

**Community Health Workers Bill.**
MPHA worked closely with the Massachusetts Community Health Worker Network (MACHW) to craft legislation requiring the state to assess the roles and impacts of community health workers in helping people obtain health care and reduce health disparities. The bill was incorporated wholesale into the state’s landmark health care reform law passed in April, 2006.

**Staff**
- Geoff Wilkinson, Executive Director
- Roberta Friedman, Director of Education
- A. Greer Harewood, Administrative Assistant
- Stan Holt, Organizing Consultant
- AJ Juarez, Community Organizer
- Sara Kanovsky, Community Organizer
- Kara Keenan, Membership & Development Coordinator
- Wanda Santiago, Business Manager
- Lisa Renee Siciliano, Executive Director MACHW
- Eric Weltman, Deputy Director of Policy & Advocacy

**Interns**
- Dana Bowie, Correctional Health Intern
- Melody Hugo, Hepatitis C Coalition Intern

**Former Staff and Interns**
- Maddie Ribble, Administrative Assistant
- Justin Chellman, UMASS, Amherst
- Laura Cody, Boston University School of Public Health
- A. Greer Harewood, Boston College
- Patricia Finnerty, Harvard School of Public Health
- Sarah Fontaine, College of the Holy Cross
- Carmel Kelly, UMASS, Amherst
- Javeria Mir, UMASS, Amherst
- Allie Rosene-Mirvis, Harvard College
- Laura Rubin, Boston University School of Public Health
- Jennie Nathans, Boston University School of Social Work
- Jason Sullivan, UMASS, Lowell
- Lindsey Tucker, Harvard School of Public Health
From Boston to the Berkshires, MPHA is boosting the visibility of public health in the media. Our work and views over the past year have been featured in TV and radio news stories, newspaper articles and editorials, op-ed pieces, and letters to the editor. We have received coverage in numerous local papers and in all of the state’s major regional press. MPHA’s work has also received national coverage in the American Public Health Association’s national news journal, *Our Nation’s Health*.

In 2000, MPHA helped put the childhood obesity epidemic on the political agenda with our report, “The Health of Our Children: Who’s Paying Attention?” Since then, MPHA has waged a strong campaign at the local and state levels to prevent childhood obesity, focusing on improving nutrition at school.

MPHA took the lead in advocating for legislation sponsored by Representative Peter Koutoujian to prohibit the sale of soda and junk food in Massachusetts schools. Taking on both the beverage and food industries, MPHA combined strong organizing and advocacy to successfully move “An Act to Promote Proper School Nutrition” through two joint committees of the legislature.

We published over 50 letters and op-ed pieces in the press, garnered over 100 endorsements from organizations and newspapers, and distributed thousands of “got lunch?” postcards that humorously depict a school “lunch” of soda and junk food. We mobilized hundreds of parents, teachers, students, and community activists in the effort and worked closely with coalition partners. We also participated in numerous advisory committees and conferences on childhood obesity.
MPHA has also been promoting healthy school nutrition through technical assistance to communities across Massachusetts. In March, we sponsored a well-attended forum in western Massachusetts on writing school wellness policies. In Worcester, MPHA organized a project to help middle school students learn about the benefits of organic farming and the problems with junk food. We wrote an op-ed piece on packing a healthy school lunch that was published in over a dozen local newspapers. We also recently won a foundation grant to promote wellness policies in the Framingham public schools.

At the national level, MPHA is part of the network of public health organizations and legal advocates that this spring compelled the beverage industry to agree to phase out soda sales in schools. Bottling companies took the action in the face of legal challenges and mounting grassroots pressure, hoping their concession would thwart the power of state-based organizing that MPHA will continue to lead.

As part of our ongoing work to strengthen the local public health system in Massachusetts, MPHA continued to provide staffing support for the Coalition for Local Public Health, which includes MPHA and the statewide associations representing health boards, health officers, environmental health officials, and public health nurses.

In light of emerging public health threats, such as pandemic flu, natural disasters, and terrorism, the Coalition for Local Public Health commissioned an analysis of the state’s public health workforce, Strengthening Local Public Health in Massachusetts: A Call to Action. Among the study’s conclusions: over 70 percent of local health officials report that they do not have enough staff to fulfill their responsibilities. At a widely-covered State House media event in June, the Coalition was joined by Senator Richard Moore and Representative Patricia Walrath, co-chairs of the Health Care Financing Committee, and Senator Susan Fargo, co-chair of the Public Health Advocacy Institute’s national conference on legal approaches to preventing obesity;

Sample highlights include:

• helped organize the 17th annual Western Massachusetts Elder Care Conference in Springfield, attended by over 275 elder care providers;
• organized a forum on climate change and public health with Dr. Paul Epstein of the Harvard Medical School, sponsored by MPHA’s Environmental and Occupational Health Section;
• organized a film showing and discussion about African American women with AIDS, sponsored by MPHA’s Women’s Health and Minority Health Sections;
• presented at the Public Health Advocacy Institute’s national conference on legal approaches to preventing obesity;
• participated in a State House press conference with Representatives Gloria Fox and Byron Rushing, Alternatives for Community and Environment, and the Massachusetts Nurses Association to announce new legislation to regulate biological laboratories, which MPHA helped to draft.
In WESTERN MASSACHUSETTS, MPHA organized support for legislative and budget victories through education and outreach with elected officials, networking with other organizations, and expanded newspaper, radio, and television coverage. A legislative breakfast in June, co-sponsored by MPHA, featured advocates discussing the new health care legislation. At the community level, MPHA helped establish a new coalition of community health workers, the Community Outreach Workers Training and Network Coalition, which meets bimonthly and has held trainings on workplace safety and violence prevention. In addition, MPHA continued its involvement in a project to rehabilitate a greenhouse at a Holyoke elementary school.

Working in Coalition

As the “umbrella organization” for public health in Massachusetts, coalition work is key to MPHA’s success. We lead, support, participate in a number of coalitions, including:

- MPHA is a lead member of the Alliance for a Healthy Tomorrow, an environmental health coalition that passed the Mercury Bill this year.
- MPHA provides staff support for the Coalition for Local Public Health, which published a groundbreaking report this year assessing the local public health workforce.
- MPHA coordinates the Massachusetts Hepatitis C Coalition, which won increased funding for prevention and treatment programs in the FY07 budget.
- MPHA staffs the United We Stand for Public Health Coalition, providing timely information and advocacy support to over 100 public health organizations.
- MPHA helps lead the Collaborative for School Health, which won a large increase in funding for school health services in the FY07 budget.
- MPHA was represented on the steering committee of the ACT! Coalition, which helped pass this year’s landmark health care reform legislation.

Health Committee, in calling attention to the need to strengthen local public health boards and departments.

Over the past year, MPHA has also been a leading partner in strategic planning to develop a regional system for local public health in Massachusetts. The project, now managed by the Boston University School of Public Health, involves close cooperation with legislative leaders and state and local health department officials. It is intended to prompt far-reaching legislative and administrative action starting in 2007.

Pandemic Flu Preparation

MPHA has taken a leading role in efforts to improve planning to prepare for pandemic influenza.

Over the past year, we:

- linked education about pandemic and seasonal flu to advocate effectively for influenza vaccines in the state budget;
- obtained TV news coverage and a published Boston Globe op-ed calling for improved state leadership in pandemic planning;
- organized local public health officials from across the state to participate in planning how to spend federal pandemic preparedness funds, resulting in increased direct funding for local health departments;
- began organizing a series of four regional forums across the state designed to assist local and state health officials improve planning with community representatives to address the needs of vulnerable "special populations," including elders, children, people with disabilities, linguistic minorities, et al.

MPHA’s 2006 annual meeting was also organized on the theme of pandemic preparedness, featuring keynote speaker Alfred W. Crosby, author of America’s Forgotten Pandemic: The Influenza of 1918.
Massachusetts pioneered a new approach to increasing health care access in 2006, gaining national attention for a plan that redefines individual, corporate, and state responsibilities. MPHA was represented on the steering committee of the ACT! Coalition that worked on the plan as it moved through the legislative process. We advised policy makers on the inclusion of $14.5 million in supplementary funding for disease prevention programs that was included as part of the plan, and we worked closely with the Massachusetts Community Health Worker Network on a successful effort to incorporate a study about the impacts of community health workers into the health reform law.

During the process, MPHA developed and publicized a set of principles to guide health care reform. The state’s new law falls short on several of those principles. Consistent with the organization’s long standing support for true universal coverage, MPHA also cooperated in the effort to win a constitutional amendment making a health care a right in Massachusetts, and we continued to support the MassCare coalition’s single payer health care bill.

MPHA’s work to reduce health disparities included board training, strategic planning, and fiscal management support for the Massachusetts Community Health Worker Network (MACHW). We also worked closely with MACHW as partners in an effort led by Action for Boston Community Development to win funding for a multi-year project to promote workforce development for community health workers. MPHA and MACHW now co-chair the policy development committee of the Boston Community Health Worker Initiative, a SkillWorks initiative managed by the Boston Foundation and funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

MPHA also participated as a partner in the Health Careers Opportunity Program, a summer program managed by the Tufts University School of Medicine to encourage Boston youth of color to enter the health professions. MPHA organized members to serve as program mentors and made arrangements for youth in the program to spend time “shadowing” health professionals on-site in their work places.

MPHA’s work in correctional health care was managed by a doctoral candidate at Boston University, who served on a medical review panel to the Department of Correction Advisory Council charged with developing recommendations to improve health care and mental health services for female offenders. Recommendations published in December, 2005 are expected to be incorporated into future DOC health care services contracts.

MPHA’s accomplishments in the policy arena this year were made possible in no small measure by a growing, active membership. With full time community organizers based in Springfield and Worcester, we have been able to build regional committees to develop new leadership and guide local education and advocacy in concert with MPHA’s statewide campaigns.

In Central Massachusetts, MPHA has launched a Model Healthy Schools campaign, growing out of our advocacy on school nutrition and health services. In April, the committee held a successful media event in recognition of National Public Health Week, highlighting the need for more funding for school health services and in support of the school nutrition bill. Local officials shared the podium with students and nurses. At the same time, an intern led a project to engage Worcester middle school students in public health, teaching them about testing for environmental toxins, the benefits of organic farming, and the health impacts of junk food.

The goal of the new campaign is to preserve and expand funding for community schools and school-based health centers in Greater Worcester. The committee plans to support a pilot project to design and fund a school health center that will be open to the community throughout the school day and after school hours.