



MAINE CENTER FOR PUBLIC HEALTH

Improving the Health of Maine Communities

Fall, 2001

Maine Turning Point Begins Phase II



Two years ago the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation challenged Maine to strengthen its public health system. The Foundation provided financing for a two year planning project that involved the Maine Center for Public Health, Medical Care Development, Inc., the Bureau of Health and many other organizations. That planning effort produced a "Public Health Improvement Plan" that is now available online at www.mcph.org. The plan set as top priority the development of a "local public health infrastructure." In addition to producing an ambitious plan the project also contributed to the design of the current Tobacco Settlement grants to community and school coalitions. Many public health advocates hope that the grants represent the first step toward the new infrastructure envisioned by Turning Point participants.

Maine Turning Point has led to a number of initiatives in Maine that have recently begun or are soon to begin. The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation has decided to contribute funds to these efforts, and has been joined in

its generosity by the Bingham Program and the Jessie B. Cox Charitable Trust.

The *Bingham Program* funds will be directed toward educational program development. Turning Point planners recognized that the public health system would not be effectively strengthened until leaders at all levels had opportunity for relevant education and training.

Meanwhile, the *Jessie B. Cox Charitable Trust* has contributed funds to support activities related to public health constituency-building in Maine. Efforts in this area focus on enhancing communications, increasing advocacy, supporting collaboration, and developing strategic plans with key groups. Funding from this grant will also help the Maine Public Health Association improve its capacity to play a key role in public health for the state of Maine. This grant will also enable the Center to re-constitute the Maine Turning Point Steering Committee to respond to the issues that must be resolved before the vision of a new local public health infrastructure can be realized.

Activities funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation grant include several training programs, a peer mentoring program, a social marketing program, and the development of newsletters and community partnerships.

"Recent events have made it clear that creation of a strong community based public health system in Maine is a necessity, not a luxury. Our investment in this system is an investment in the future health and welfare of our citizens."

Edward Miller
President, Maine Public Health Association, CEO American Lung Association of Maine

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MAINE CENTER FOR PUBLIC HEALTH

12 Church Streets
Augusta, Maine
04330

Phone: 207-629-9272
Fax: 207-629-9277

www.mcph.org

phealth@mcph.org

From the President...

The events of September 11 shocked, saddened and angered Mainers, as well as all Americans. I've been reflecting upon the significance of the tragedy for public health, as have many others. Public health advocates have written about the need to enhance preparations for disasters in general and for bioterrorism in particular. Others have spoken out against mistreatment of minorities, especially Arab-Americans and our many visitors from the Middle East. Still others have issued warnings about the expected increase in the number of unemployed and uninsured Americans as the economy continues downhill.

All of the above are extremely important across the U.S. and in Maine. I am however, most struck by the way the tragedy had heightened our awareness of our collective vulnerability. People learned in less than an hour about the incredible fragility of life, a perspective that Israelis and Palestinians, among others, have had for decades. We also realized the need for a shared response. Approval ratings for President Bush skyrocketed immediately following the tragedy, and a survey conducted after September 11 found that American support for government in general had nearly doubled over the previous year.

The World Trade Center tragedy has communicated a message in minutes that public health advocates have been struggling to communicate for decades, that both individual and community health depend ultimately upon the effectiveness of our community response to chronic and infectious disease threats, (as well as terrorism). Our death rate from tobacco-related diseases dwarfs that from the World Trade Center and Pentagon disaster. But the latter is much more dramatic. Is it too much to hope that this tragedy born of evil can become a force for good, a window of opportunity for positive change? The answer is up to us.

Paul Campbell



New staff members at MCPH...

The Maine Center for Public Health is pleased to welcome 2 new staff members! Noreen Mahan was hired in August as Project Assistant for the Maine-Harvard Prevention Research Center project. She has earned a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree, a Master's degree in Public Administration, and a graduate-level certificate in Gerontology from Clark University in Worcester, Massachusetts. Noreen has spent seven years coordinating and instructing programs at Area Agencies on Aging in Massachusetts and Knox County, Maine. She also has extensive experience in marketing, a strong background in computer design/web page development and will be working on communication and information dissemination processes.

Brenda Joly, hired in September, is the Turning Point Project Director for Maine and the Education Coordinator for the Center. She earned her Bachelor's degree in Health Management and Policy from the University of New Hampshire and her Master's and Doctorate in Public Health from the University of South Florida. She has been involved in several statewide and national public health initiatives focusing on distance education, program evaluation, and issues related to maternal and child health. Her work at the center focuses on strengthening Maine's public health workforce through education as well as strengthening the public health infrastructure in the state.

Noreen Mahan



Brenda Joly



Maine-Harvard Prevention Research Center (M-HPRC) Project Update

After four months of meetings, drafts, editing and rewriting, the Maine-Harvard Prevention Research Center Project (M-HPRC) Steering Committee completed a three-year strategic plan. The final plan was released to the Steering Committee at its September 13th meeting.

The Maine-Harvard Prevention Research Center project is a collaboration between the Maine Center for Public Health, the Harvard Prevention Research Center (PRC), the Maine Bureau of Health, the Department of Education, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and many other state and community level partners. The collaboration with the Harvard PRC allows Maine to benefit from Harvard's expertise in applied public health research projects, surveillance systems, evaluation and capacity building particularly around physical activity, nutrition and obesity in youth.

Over the next three years, the primary activities of the M-HPRC will include:

1. Development of a M-HPRC Workshop series (2 per year) to inform different target audiences about evidence based strategies and the latest research on topics related to improving physical activity, nutrition and reducing obesity in youth.
2. Improve the website to make research, best practice information, tools, etc. available in a way that is easy to find and easy to use.
3. Work with the Dept. of Education and Bureau of Health to develop a youth overweight/obesity surveillance system.
4. Provide technical assistance and support to community-based research efforts and programs that will further the knowledge in the field of nutrition, physical activity and obesity particularly among youth.

Our current efforts include:

- A December 5, 2001 workshop on the relationship between soda and obesity and TV viewing and obesity.
- Working with the Dept. of Education and Bureau of Health on a stakeholders meeting for school nurses to identify what data they would like to collect to assist them in program planning, policy development or evaluation
- Providing technical assistance to the Franklin Healthy Community Coalition, Eastern Maine Medical Center and the school/community grantees in Bangor and Blue Hill to plan, implement and/or evaluate interventions that will reduce obesity in youth and/or improve physical activity
- Updating the website, identifying relevant research articles, and developing a plan to disseminate that information.



A copy of the Strategic Plan is found at: www.mcph.org.

New Public Health Education Programs in Maine

There are several new and exciting educational opportunities underway in Maine that will be taking place over the next year. These will be based on collaborative efforts between The Maine Center for Public Health and several organizations. They include:

- A Public Health Legislative Institute in collaboration with the Maine Public Health Association and the Bureau of Health
- A Public Health Institute for Municipal Government officials
- A Mentoring Program for local coalition leaders with the new Maine Network of Healthy Communities
- A regional seminar for community health center leaders held in conjunction with the Harvard School of Public Health and the National Association of Community Health Centers
- Workshops on evidence based strategies and research related to nutrition, physical activity and obesity among youth. The first in this series will be held on December 5, 2001. The workshop called "Preventing Childhood Obesity, the Skinny on Soda and TV" will be held at the Senator Inn.

In addition, the University of New England and the University of Southern Maine are planning specific public health educational opportunities. We hope to have more information available about these programs in the near future.

For more information about these activities please visit our website at www.mcph.org or contact Brenda Joly at the Maine Center for Public Health, bjoly@mcph.org.



Maine-Harvard Prevention Research
Center Workshop Series Presents:

**PREVENTING
CHILDHOOD
OBESITY:
The 'Skinny'
On
soda and T.V.**

December 5th, 2001

\$15.00 fee includes lunch (limited seating available)
Senator Inn & Spa
Western Avenue at I-95
Augusta, Maine

**For information & to register visit www.mcph.org
Or call 207.629.9272 for a brochure.**



Speakers include:

Steven Gortmaker, Ph.D

Senior lecturer in the department of Health & Social Behavior at the Harvard School of Public Health and principal investigator and director of the Harvard Prevention Research Center. He was involved in early studies to document the increase of obesity in young people, and television viewing as a cause of obesity.

Dora Anne Mills, MD, MPH

A native of Maine, she practiced Medicine in Tanzania, East Africa, Los Angeles, and Farmington, Maine before taking her current job in 1996 as the Director of the Maine Bureau of Health and as Maine's Chief Health Officer.

Karen Peterson, RD, ScD

Associate professor of nutrition in the departments of Maternal & Child Health and Nutrition at the Harvard School of Public Health. She draws from 15 years of experience counseling and administering nutrition services for children in clinical, community, and state health care settings.

The **M-HPRC** series will be holding two workshops per year on effective strategies & current research related to a healthier population of children & youth in Maine.

MAINE CENTER FOR
PUBLIC HEALTH
12 Church Street
Augusta, Maine 04330
Phone: 207-629-9272
Fax: 207-629-9277



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Augusta, ME