

North East Public Health Alliance

December 11th, 2025 Meeting Minutes

11:00 am - 1:00 pm EST

Hybrid Meeting

In-Person: Chelmsford Board of Health

Virtual: <https://us06web.zoom.us/j/87533291697>

Voting members in attendance:

Shelagh Collins, Billerica

Donna Greenwood, Chelmsford

Shannon Gillis, Tewksbury

Kerri Oun, Tyngsborough

Non-voting members in attendance:

Christine West, Billerica

Manizeh Afridi, BME Strategies

Cynthia Baker, BME Strategies

Haleigh Schultz, BME Strategies

Darcy Beall, Chelmsford

Elise Pierce, Chelmsford

Siobhan LaFreniere, Tewksbury

Bethany Slack, Regional Public Health Specialist

Voting members absent:

Kristel Bennett, Billerica

I. Opening

4/4 voting members present, quorum was met.

Motion to start the meeting

Kerri Oun made a motion to start the meeting. Donna Greenwood seconded the motion.

Billerica: Y

Chelmsford: Y

Tewksbury: Y

Tyngsborough: Y

All in favor.

Manizeh Afridi called the meeting to order at 11:08AM.

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Motion to approve outstanding meeting minutes

Shannon Gillis motioned to approve the November 20th meeting minutes. Kerri Oun seconded the motion.

Billerica: Y

Chelmsford: Y

Tewksbury: Y

Tyngsborough: Y

All in favor.

II. Announcements & Reminders

A. Upcoming Training Opportunities

- 12/18: MHOA December Quarterly Meeting

The MHOA December Quarterly meeting, focusing on "Epidemiologists in Action: Your Local Health Department's Secret Weapon," is scheduled for December 18th from 10am - 11:30am. Topics include tick-borne diseases, MCH, Tobacco, Retail density, community mapping, and leveraging data for community profiles.

- MEHA Title 5 Seminar

Deadline to apply is February 13th: Linked [here](#).

B. Reminders:

- SAPHE 2.0 Reporting coming soon in 2026...

The initiative involves two surveys:

1. Workforce Standards Survey (Early 2026): Anonymous survey of local public health staff/contractors to assess current expertise and identify future training needs.
2. Performance Standards Survey (Spring 2026): Self-report by each local public health entity on their FY26 capacity to meet Performance Standards.

III. Regional Staff & Hiring Check-In

A. Updates

- a. Bethany Slack has officially started as the Regional Public Health Specialist, working 10 hours/week (Wednesdays PM, Thursdays, Fridays) on NEPHA-related work. Her schedule is Wednesday after 1 pm, and flexible on Thursday and Friday (noting some towns close Fridays). She will be setting up 1:1 meetings with each community soon. Contact: bslack@tyngsboroughma.gov.
- b. Regional Inspector Hiring Update Summary:
 - Seven applications were received; four met minimum qualifications and scored

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highly.

- Of the four highly qualified applicants, three responded to outreach; one has since accepted another position.
 - Two candidates remain under consideration:
 - Candidate A: Strong organizational fit; would require inspection training.
 - Candidate B: Currently a health inspector trainee; prepared to begin work, with identified transportation limitations that may affect field coverage needs.
- Decision:** The group will proceed with a subcommittee interview with Candidate B to further discuss transportation and availability related to job requirements.

IV. Term 1 Recap & Next Steps

A. Workplan Progress

The group reported strong overall progress on the workplan. The only item currently stalled is the translation of the NEPHA fact sheet. Members discussed the limitations of translating materials that require frequent updates. As a result, the group decided to move forward with translating the fact sheet specifically for the Community Baby Shower in June, while continuing to reassess broader language needs on an ongoing basis.

B. Tobacco Use Prevention

Regional staff across several municipalities are actively working on tobacco and nicotine use prevention, including local regulation of nicotine and kratom products. The group noted that this topic should be revisited by the NEPHA collaborative if specific regional goals are identified. Concerns were raised about local regulations being circumvented through purchases in neighboring communities or online. Several effective prevention strategies were shared, including the use of contractor-led vaping symposiums and the “Hidden in Plain Sight” model to train parents on identifying concealed tobacco and vaping products, which was reported to have a setup cost of approximately \$1,200. Youth engagement efforts were also highlighted, including a free, day-long youth retreat planned for April, alongside acknowledgement of ongoing challenges with parent participation in after-school prevention programming.

C. Communication & Engagement

The group discussed opportunities to increase visibility and awareness of the collaborative. Suggestions included placing an article in local newspapers to announce the group and promote the Community Baby Shower. Members noted that Boards of Health are already aware of the collaborative through updates shared

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by regional staff. An upcoming community meeting was also highlighted as an opportunity for each department to share information with residents. The group encouraged municipalities to share upcoming events and dates so that NEPHA materials can be prepared and distributed in advance.

D. Next Steps

The group agreed to continue work on distributing the NEPHA fact sheet and advancing partnership mapping efforts to identify and address service gaps. Additional focus areas include expanding education and outreach related to tobacco and related products, as well as researching relevant state and local regulations. Plans also include conducting outreach to community partners and developing flyers, materials, and activities for upcoming events. Finally, retention and job satisfaction were identified as ongoing priorities.

V. Strategic Planning Discussion

Key themes from one-on-one conversations highlighted a need for clearer understanding among boards, leadership, and community members about the role and value of public health. Participants noted that while extensive work is being done, communication is inconsistent and data systems are insufficient to track activities, demonstrate impact, and support decision-making. There is also a need for leadership to better understand what current funding supports and why sustained investment is critical for core public health services.

A. Proposed Scope of Work

The proposed strategic planning effort would focus on clarifying public health's role through a clear, shared narrative of core functions and community impact; strengthening communication and visibility through tools such as one-page summaries and presentations; enhancing data and performance tracking by assessing current systems and identifying improvements; aligning funding with service needs; and developing a shared vision and priorities for the collaborative.

B. Engagement and Time Commitment

The engagement is anticipated to span four to six months and include one full-day kick-off session, followed by approximately one hour per month of staff time, with flexibility for additional staff participation as needed.

C. Group Discussion Highlights

Members emphasized that this process would support FY26 budget planning while positioning the collaborative for long-term success. The discussion focused on identifying gaps, refining existing efforts, and determining future staffing or focus areas—particularly related to data and strategic direction—to further align the group.

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D. Next Steps

A draft scope of work will be developed and shared for review, with the goal of voting at the January meeting. Time will be allotted for feedback from member communities and partner departments. Upon approval, the group will work with the Town of Tyngsborough's administration to move forward with procurement, with options including an RFP, RFQ, or use of a state contract.

Motion to move forward with Strategic Planning procurement in FY26

Donna Greenwood motioned to move forward with strategic planning. Shannon Gillis seconded the motion.

Billerica: Y

Chelmsford: Y

Tewksbury: Y

Tyngsborough: Y

All in favor.

E. Strategic Planning Discussion (continued)

The group reviewed the proposed Strategic Plan Scope of Work and expressed strong alignment with its direction. Members noted that the scope reflects prior discussions and appropriately emphasizes practical deliverables that can be used beyond the planning process. The importance of ensuring broad NEPHA representation in the evaluation process was discussed, with interest in including additional members beyond municipal administration. Donna Greenwood and Shannon Gillis volunteered to support evaluation efforts alongside Tyngsborough Town Admin. The updated draft Scope of Work will be circulated for review, with plans to formally vote on approval at the January meeting and initiate the procurement process in coordination with Tyngsborough town administration.

VI. Community Updates

- **Billerica:** Hosted a Community Housing Forum, which led to new connections with the Council on Aging. Plans are underway to collaborate on delivering financial education programming in community settings.
- **Chelmsford:** Ongoing cross-sector work includes a Suicide Prevention Task Force focused on prevention, social and emotional wellbeing, and stigma reduction, with potential programming planned for the spring. Efforts emphasize coordination across municipal departments and community partners. Funding flexibility has allowed for reallocation of resources to support suicide prevention initiatives. Additional work includes planning

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education initiatives in collaboration with schools, libraries, and behavioral health partners.

- **Tewksbury:** Successfully completed a community coat drive, distributing 138 new and gently used coats, more than double the previous year's total.
- **Tyngsborough:** Welcomed a new administrator, who began onboarding in a part-time capacity and is expected to transition to full-time in January.

VII. Adjournment

The next regular coalition meeting will be held on Thursday, January 8th, from 11AM-1PM in Billerica, with a virtual option available for those with conflicts.

Motion to adjourn the meeting

Donna Greenwood motioned to adjourn the meeting. Kerri Oun seconded the motion.

Billerica: Y

Chelmsford: Y

Tewksbury: Y

Tyngsborough: Y

All in favor.

The meeting adjourned at 12:59PM.

Documents used by the public body during the meeting:

- NEPHA December 11th Meeting Slides
- Proposed Strategic Planning Scope of Work