BME STRATEGIES

North East Public Health Alliance

NEPHA
NORTHEAST PUBLIC HEALTH ALLIANCE

September 10th, 2026 Meeting Minutes

11:00 am - 1:00 pm EST
In-Person: Billerica Health Department

Voting members in attendance:
Kristel Bennett, Billerica
Donna Greenwood, Chelmsford
Shannon Gillis, Tewksbury
Kerri Oun, Tyngsborough

Non-voting members in attendance:
Manizeh Afridi, BME Strategies
Kerri Sands, Regional Inspector
Bethany Slack, Regional Public Health Specialist
Ashley Pavlakos, Regional Public Health Nurse
Siobhan LaFreniere, Tewksbury
Elise Pierce, Chelmsford
Phavy Pheng, Billerica
Shelagh Collins, Billerica
Christine West, Billerica
Jennifer Murphy, NEPHA Intern

Voting members absent:
None

I. Opening

4/4 voting members present, quorum was met.

Motion to start the meeting
Kristel Bennett made a motion to start the meeting. Shannon Gillis seconded the motion.

Billerica: Y
Chelmsford: Y
Tewksbury: Y
Tyngsborough: Y
All in favor.

Manizeh Afridi called the meeting to order at 11:09 AM.

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II. Approval of Meeting Minutes

Motion to approve July meeting minutes

Kerri Oun motioned to approve July meeting minutes. Kristel Bennett seconded the motion.

Billerica: Y
Chelmsford: Y
Tewksbury: Y
Tyngsborough: Y
All in favor.

III. Announcements

Upcoming Training Opportunities:

- **Community Health Worker Training Program**
  September 15 – November 5, Tuesdays and Thursdays, 9:00 AM – 1:00 PM (In-Person, Malden)
  Cambridge Health Alliance is currently accepting applications for the Fall 2026 Community Health Worker Training Program. Offered at no cost, this in-person initiative aims to prepare and empower individuals to enhance community health outcomes. Participants will gain key core competencies defined by the MA Board of Certification of Community Health Workers and earn a Mental Health First Aid certification.

- **Climate Resiliency and Emergency Preparedness for Private Wells**
  September 17, 11:00 AM – 12:00 PM (Virtual)
  Designed for private well owners, public health officials, water professionals, and key stakeholders, this complimentary one-hour webinar addresses environmental threats including droughts and flooding. Participants will review strategies for improving system resilience, emergency management planning, operational maintenance, and risk mitigation to support long-term water safety.

- **MHOA September Quarterly Meeting: Lead, Coach, and Grow: Practical Skills for Managing High-Performing Teams**
  September 17, 10:00 AM – 12:00 PM (In-Person, Andover)
  This interactive workshop examines actionable approaches for setting expectations, enhancing workplace communication, and driving staff performance in local health departments. Registration is $75 for MHOA members, with a deadline of September 10.

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- **Vector Communication Strategies Webinar**
  September 21, 3:00 PM – 4:30 PM (Virtual)
  Hosted by Gulf South Vector and featuring Darrin Dunwald, this session covers effective outreach practices for organizations and businesses sharing vital updates with municipal partners and community stakeholders.

- **2026 National Urban Rat Summit**
  September 23 – September 24, 9:30 AM – 5:30 PM (In-Person, Boston or Virtual)
  Bringing together municipal leaders, academic experts, and public health practitioners globally, this conference explores evidence-based methods to effectively mitigate rodent populations in urban areas.

- **Opioid Settlement Funds 101 Webinar**
  September 23, 2:00 PM – 3:00 PM (Virtual)
  This session introduces fundamental principles of opioid mitigation funding and highlights practical applications implemented by municipal teams. Intended for health directors, town administrators, and local officials overseeing these resources, the presentation delivers actionable insight and peer exchange suitable for communities at any planning phase.

- **Yankee Conference on Environmental Health**
  September 23 – September 25 (In-Person, Mystic, CT)
  This annual regional gathering features two and a half days of educational programming across two distinct tracks focused on emerging environmental health topics. Attendees will have access to an exhibition hall, networking receptions, continuous vendor showcases, an awards luncheon, and raffle opportunities. The registration deadline is September 7.

- **Rate Setting for Sustainable Water Utilities**
  September 28, 9:00 AM – 1:00 PM (In-Person, Northfield)
  This in-person session assists system operators in evaluating appropriate rate models and creating clear pricing structures to ensure long-term service sustainability. Attendees will review key steps involved in executing a thorough rate audit, including analyzing financial records, usage patterns, and billing history to estimate base and flow charges. Municipal board members, system operators, administrative directors, accounting personnel, and administrative support staff are encouraged to participate.

- **Framing Vector-Borne Disease Risk: The Science of Persuasive Health Communication**
  September 30, 1:00 PM – 2:00 PM (Virtual)
  This workshop reviews evidence-based techniques for conveying health risks and preventative recommendations. Participants will explore practical approaches to framing

public messages that connect effectively with local communities, foster informed decision-making, and build trust without inducing unnecessary alarm.

- **GIS for Everyone: Turning Environmental Health Data into Action**
  September 30, 2:00 PM – 3:00 PM (Virtual)
  Geographic Information Systems (GIS) offer robust capabilities for interpreting, displaying, and sharing environmental public health information, serving organizations across all phases of implementation. This online session features environmental health practitioners presenting real-world strategies for leveraging spatial data, interactive dashboards, and mapping tools to enhance program operations, inform policy choices, foster collaboration, and illustrate community health outcomes. Attendees will review adaptable GIS integration practices and examine diverse use cases across local initiatives, acquiring actionable insights applicable to their agencies regardless of existing technical capacity.

- **The State of Sludge: Managing Wastewater Residuals in Massachusetts**
  October 7, 12:00 PM – 1:00 PM (Virtual)
  This complimentary one-hour session examines the shifting regulatory environment surrounding biosolids and details the operational hurdles local entities encounter when processing municipal wastewater residuals. As regional processing facilities reach full capacity and chemical contamination limits traditional land application, rising operational expenses present significant long-term management challenges throughout the Commonwealth.

- **Best Practices for Risk Communication for Emergent Threats**
  October 20, 1:00 PM – 2:00 PM (Virtual)
  This workshop reviews core tenets of effective public engagement during rapidly evolving vector-borne health risks. Attendees will explore practical methods for delivering clear, reliable, and prompt messaging designed to maintain community confidence and navigate public uncertainty.

IV. NEPHA Updates:

A. Welcome Jennifer Murphy!

Jennifer Murphy, RN, is a graduate student in the Master of Public Health program at UMass Lowell, and will be completing her practicum with an internship with NEPHA from September to early spring 2027. Her primary project centers on creating a comprehensive Community Resource Navigation directory to address regional housing instability. Once finalized, the tool will assist local officials who regularly engage with community members navigating challenges related to rent or utility debt, pending displacement, condemned property notices, and unhoused conditions. To inform this initiative, outreach is underway to set up conversations with local partners across member municipalities. Rather than replacing existing local

channels, this effort aims to offer a consolidated, up-to-date tool that supports community partners in assisting individuals experiencing housing challenges.

B. **Thank you, Bethany Slack!**
We extend our heartfelt gratitude to Bethany Slack, NEPHA's Regional Public Health Specialist, as she transitions to a full-time role with the Billerica Council on Aging. While we will miss her, we are thrilled for her next chapter and deeply appreciative of her outstanding contributions to our communities. Her final day with us will be September 17th.

C. **Announcing Kerri Oun's retirement!**
Kerri Oun has shared that she is retiring, with her final day scheduled for October 8th. We are immensely thankful for her dedicated leadership and support in establishing our coalition, and we will miss her deeply. Congratulations to Kerri Oun on a well-earned retirement, and thank you for your exceptional contributions to public health in Tyngsborough and across our coalition. We wish you all the best in your next chapter!

V. Draft Scope of Work for Title 5 Inspectional Support

The conversation centered on Donna Greenwood's proposed revisions to the scope of work for the Title 5 Inspectional Support role. Manizeh Afridi will revise the document to incorporate the committee's feedback and will distribute the updated draft alongside the meeting notes for further review.

VI. FY26 Recap & FY27 Work Plan Review

The coalition conducted a review of their prior fiscal year achievements, evaluating both financial performance and workplan execution, and subsequently examined their scheduled workplan initiatives for the current fiscal year.

VII. Billerica Community Data Brief

Under the Assessment & Surveillance elective component of the FY27 workplan, Manizeh Afridi presented a community health briefing for Billerica using data from the Massachusetts Health Data tool. This profile was shared with the coalition to offer insight into the town's demographic profile, key community needs, and potential support areas. Similar data presentations will be created for all NEPHA member municipalities, with Chelmsford scheduled as the next community profile. These briefings aim to foster a clearer understanding of each municipality's unique population and priorities while highlighting potential opportunities for regional coordination and programming.

VIII. Adjournment

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To avoid conflicting with the Tewksbury Health Fair, the coalition opted to reschedule its October meeting. The upcoming regular coalition meeting is set for Thursday, October 15th, and will be held in-person in Chelmsford.

Motion to adjourn the meeting
Kerri Oun motioned to adjourn the meeting. Shannon Gillis seconded the motion.

Billerica: Y
Chelmsford: Y
Tewksbury: Y
Tyngsborough: Y
All in favor.

The meeting adjourned at 1:06PM.

Documents used by the public body during the meeting:

- NEPHA September 10th Meeting Slides
- Draft Scope of Work for Title 5 Inspector
- Billerica Community Health Briefing Slides