



**Mission:** To improve public health in Maryland through education and advocacy

**Vision:** Healthy Marylanders living in Healthy Communities

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## **Maryland Public Health Association's Legislative Priorities**

At the annual meeting of the Maryland Public Health Association (MdPHA) in September 2015, we polled our members about what matters most to them in policymaking. The theme of the meeting, "Health in All Policies," yielded a robust discussion about public health policy improving health outcomes and quality of life for all Marylanders. Our legislative priorities this year reflect the polling results and the sentiments expressed by our membership.

### **Health Equity:**

MdPHA will prioritize policies that address health equity and environmental justice, which are core concepts in achieving health in all policies. Healthy People 2020, the nation's health objectives for the current decade, defines health equity as the "attainment of the highest level of health for all people. Achieving health equity requires valuing everyone equally with focused and ongoing societal efforts to address avoidable inequalities, historical and contemporary injustices, and the elimination of health and health care disparities." The American Public Health Association has also named health equity an overarching priority. Their work, including published case studies of public health work encompassing health equity principles<sup>1</sup> and an article by the executive director on health equity and social justice as health improvement tools, provide additional guidance for us.<sup>2</sup> We will promote health equity and environmental justice during the 2016 legislative session and throughout the year.

### **Priority Bills:**

#### **Earned sick leave**

- All workers deserve paid sick days so that no one faces the impossible choice of providing for their family or taking care of their health or their family's health.

#### **Eliminate the misuse and overuse of antibiotics in agriculture**

- Eliminating routine, non-therapeutic uses of antibiotics in the meat industry can reduce the potential for antibiotic resistance and ensure these important drugs remain effective for treating humans.

#### **Increase taxes on cigarettes by \$1 per pack**

- Raising the state tobacco tax by one dollar a pack would drastically reduce smoking and save lives, prevent youth from starting to smoke, and raise significant revenue to support public health causes.

### **Looking Forward: Mental health**

Mental health has emerged as a priority among our membership. Concerns are focused on access to, and coverage for, mental health care services, particularly for children and veterans. We will spend this year building new partnerships and strengthening existing relationships with groups working to improve mental health and mental health care in Maryland.

*MdPHA is the state affiliate of the American Public Health Association (APHA), a 142-year-old professional organization with more than 50,000 members. MdPHA has more than 150 members throughout the state, including our state and local health departments. We organize strong, active networks for the public's health, and we advocate for sound policies in Annapolis.*

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.apha.org/~media/files/pdf/topics/equity/equity\\_stories.ashx](https://www.apha.org/~media/files/pdf/topics/equity/equity_stories.ashx)

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.apha.org/~media/files/pdf/topics/equity/health\\_equity\\_social\\_justice\\_apha\\_may\\_2015.ashx](https://www.apha.org/~media/files/pdf/topics/equity/health_equity_social_justice_apha_may_2015.ashx)