

*On a recent winter day, Maine's State House hosted a bustling reception for the Maine Network of Healthy Communities (MNHC), a Turning Point-funded coalition of community groups who deliver an array of prevention and health promotion services throughout the state. As Governor John Baldacci noted in his remarks, it is members of the Network who "are out there doing what needs to be done" to help Maine people live healthier lives.*

## Maine Turning Point Maine Communities Speak

In its three-year history, the coalition has taken important steps to realizing its vision of Maine people who "are healthy, not just because of access to appropriate medical services, but also because of neighborhood vitality, satisfying employment, safe environments, and diverse recreational, educational, and cultural opportunities."

Community coalitions have a rich history in Maine, a state without a structure of local health departments. Instead, organizational partnerships seek to address the conditions that have led to the state's epidemic of chronic

disease. The Network stemmed from recognition that coalitions need a statewide voice to advocate for community health issues, as well as a mechanism to share information, ideas, and best practices.

**The Network's origin stemmed from recognition that coalitions need a statewide voice to advocate for community health issues in Maine, as well as a mechanism to share information, ideas, and best practices.**

"We've come along way since our inception," notes Network president Leah Binder. "Our first years were occupied with recruiting members and defining our vision and mission in a consensual way. It's important for local health activists to feel that they are heard."

In addition to organizational activities such



as developing a board and membership requirements, coalition members were actively involved in the statewide Turning Point Project. In a variety of listening sessions, members made it clear that community voices should be heard in planning for public health infrastructure.

"One of our key activities has been

mentoring and information sharing," notes Binder. She adds, "in a rural state like Maine, people can feel isolated. The Network helps us share ideas and support community health efforts across the state."

The coalition has created a Web site ([www.thehcnetwork.org](http://www.thehcnetwork.org)) and a newsletter to spread the word about member activities and programs. It recently began a Web-based "shareware" project, which will allow showcasing of "best practices" in community health efforts in Maine. The MNHC also has identified common Healthy Community indicators such as sector involvement, civic engagement, community change leadership, community change participation, scope of work, and resources generated.

In its final two years of funding, the Network plans to expand its mentoring focus, with an eye on sustainability. Public health activists recently noted that the value of Turning Point funding is that it has allowed them to be creative and resourceful — to build on their strengths and create capacity for the future. The Maine Network of Healthy Communities exemplifies how this creativity and capacity for innovation can be disseminated throughout the state.

# At a Glance: *Maine*



## **Aim of Maine Turning Point**

MaineTurning Point is convened by the Maine Center for Public Health, a private, nonprofit organization established by the Maine State Legislature in 1996 to improve the health of Maine citizens. Maine Turning Point's mission is to develop a strong public health infrastructure that is able to respond to emerging challenges and has the capacity to improve the health status of Maine citizens.

## **Maine's Public Health Challenges**

Heart disease is the leading cause of death, illness, and health care costs for citizens of Maine. Unlike almost all other states, Maine does not have a systematic, statewide public health structure at the local or regional level. Strong public health systems have the ability to improve the lives of the public, protect the public's health, and ensure the delivery of the essential public health services. Citizens of Maine should have access to the benefits of public health based in a strong system. Maine needs to build a public health infrastructure at the regional level that can complement the state system and local activities.

## **MaineTurning Point's Contribution to Improving Public Health**

MaineTurning Point is:

- Promoting access and coordination of public health services throughout Maine communities to better protect the health of local citizens
- Convening community partnerships across the state to ensure the coordination of community-wide public health prevention and response programs
- Creating, through the Maine Network of Healthy Communities, new public health leaders at the local level using a formal mentoring program that matches experienced community health coalition leaders with emerging local leaders
- Providing and expanding education for public health professionals to ensure a skilled and competent workforce
- Working to improve the coordination between state-level authorities and local communities for public health data sharing, training opportunities, emergency response, and other emerging public health issues

## **For More Information**

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