The Network for Public Health Law
info@networkforphl.org
952-452-9706
networkforphl.org



The Network for Public Health Law (the Network) is a national nonprofit and leader providing expert guidance on how to leverage laws and policies to make real and lasting change.

Our team of specialized attorneys support grassroots groups, policymakers, public health agencies, advocates, community leaders, health care providers, and philanthropic organizations to strengthen systems that protect the health of our communities and advance health equity for all. Founded in 2010, we bring expertise that centers health and equity to a vast array of issue areas, including climate and health, drug harm reduction and overdose prevention, access to reproductive health care, data sharing and privacy, racial health disparities, and the social determinants of health. We understand how laws and policies can be powerful levers for change, or barriers that must be reformed.

The Network mobilizes legal and policy expertise to:

- Confront the growing politicization of public health and the widening scale and complexity of inequities.
- Unlock the power of legal expertise as an underutilized driver of systems change and equity.
- Connect policymakers, advocates, and others working to improve community health to evidence-based, actionable information, resources and tools.
- Scale partnerships with under-resourced community organizations and public health agencies to amplify equity-focused outcomes nationwide.
- Empower funders to ensure that legal and policy expertise reaches communities and jurisdictions most affected by health inequities.

Amid widening health disparities and eroding public trust, our work provides the legal and policy frameworks necessary to advance structural equity and strengthen community resilience.

Recognizing the Disconnect Between Community Needs and Policy Systems

Health inequities in the U.S. continue to widen, driven by structural barriers: poverty, racism, limited access to care, and under-resourced systems. Law and policy are among the most effective levers for meaningful, durable public health improvement, but there is a shortage of legal capacity at state, local, tribal, and territorial levels.

At the same time, community groups and advocates often lack the tools and expertise to navigate the laws that shape the health of their communities. Th e disconnect between community needs and policy systems creates gaps in implementation that frequently reinforce inequities. Meanwhile, public health agencies operate within increasingly complex and broken legal frameworks, compounded by a politicized federal environment that undermines coordination and erodes public trust.

The issues we see include:

- Law and policy span sectors, but siloed frameworks inhibit effective collaboration.
- Community groups and advocates often lack the tools, expertise, and infrastructure to navigate or influence laws that impact the health of their communities.
- Agencies have limited in-house and multi-disciplinary legal expertise to interpret and apply laws.
- Ill-conceived laws and ineffective use of law and policy deepens health disparities.
- Public health emergencies have magnified existing gaps and created confusion around legal authority.



Centering Health and Equity in Law and Policy to Ensure Better Health Outcomes

Through partnership and collaboration, and capacity support for organizations and agencies working to improve the health of communities across the country, the Network ensures that laws and policies serve as tools for health equity and positive health outcomes, not barriers. We translate complex and confusing laws, and provide strategies for leveraging them in order to drive just policy change.



Our work:

- Provides evidence-based, clear, and actionable legal guidance for community groups, policymakers, public health agencies, health care providers, advocates, and philanthropic organizations.
- Bridges policy and practice to achieve equitable, real-world outcomes.
- Equips communities and public health practitioners with the tools and training to advocate for and implement laws and policies justly and effectively.
- Integrates health justice and equity into every legal and policy recommendation.
- Supports and scales the legal capacity of public health agencies across state, local, tribal, and territorial jurisdictions.
- Enables community groups and advocates to identify legal barriers to their efforts, allowing for local solutions to be integrated.
- Facilitates quick and authoritative health agency response during public health crises (executive order inundation, pandemics).
- Creates peer learning and practice collaboratives that connect diverse partners to share best practices and solutions, coordinate efforts, and explore methods for resilience.


"... we will not shy away from investing in addressing the real-time public health challenges that have become more acute in this climate."
Richard Besser, CEO,
Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

Our Work Catalyzes Change that Improves Health in Communities

At the heart of our work is a clear purpose: to ensure laws and policies improve and protect health and equity. We catalyze change by partnering with and connecting communities, agencies, and organizations to ensure that health and equity are not afterthoughts, but the foundation of sound policy and practice. We provide tailored, evidence-informed support—helping partners clarify the law, identify policy options, and design equitable solutions that protect health and strengthen systems.

We do this through legal technical assistance, resources, tools, training, and thought partnership. Each year, thousands of public health practitioners, organizations, and advocates across the country turn to the Network for trusted, actionable guidance on the legal and policy issues that shape health outcomes.

We have:

- Provided over **3000+** instances of legal technical assistance across all 50 states, helping leaders interpret and apply laws that advance equity and strengthen community health.
- Trained **tens of thousands** of professionals nationwide through conferences, webinars, and workshops that turn legal knowledge into real-world solutions.

93%

93% of conference attendees plan to apply and share what they learned.

87%

87% of webinar attendees report greater understanding of an issue area; and nearly half take concrete action, including implementing or modifying programs.

97%

Nearly all (97%) of workshop attendees plan to integrate their learnings into their professional practice.

- Built a community of **30,000+** subscribers across all 50 states and Puerto Rico, representing over 10% of the nation's public health workforce.
- **1 in 4** members come from community-based and advocacy organizations, supporting those closest to the challenges to drive solutions.
- Reached over **500,000+** annual website visitors who actively access and download our equity-focused resources.

Each of these numbers represents a point of connection, where our guidance, resources, and trainings inform practice and policy development. By equipping those who work to protect health in communities with trusted and accessible legal expertise, the Network is turning knowledge into power, action, and lasting change.

Catalyzing Change: Expanding Equity in Lactation Care to Improve Maternal and Child Health

How Community Collaboration Led to Legislative Change.

In June 2024, Rhode Island enacted landmark legislation expanding licensure eligibility for lactation support professionals to include Certified and Advanced Lactation Counselors (CLCs and ALCs). This reform removed barriers that excluded qualified, often community-based providers from the workforce and reimbursement systems.

This policy advancement was the result of a collaborative effort that included the Network for Public Health Law; Our Journ3i, a Black-led perinatal wellness organization; and the Rhode Island Department of Health. As part of the legal project, we provided technical assistance and legal analysis, reviewed proposed changes to regulations, and produced an issue brief: *Creating an Equitable Landscape for Lactation Consultant Licensure in Rhode Island*. This brief became a key advocacy tool for the legislation and has since informed similar policy discussions in other states, including Utah.

The passage of legislation in Rhode Island to include CLCs and ALCs, significantly broadening the pool of qualified providers. As a result of this legislative change, more professionals are now able to deliver lactation support across a variety of community settings; there is enhanced access to culturally responsive care for families who have historically faced barriers to receiving adequate breastfeeding support; and Rhode Island's action established a policy precedent that other states can look to as they consider revising their own licensure laws to better meet the needs of diverse populations.



Change is Possible, Philanthropic Support is Needed.

We are at a critical juncture. Across the U.S., inequities are deepening while the tools to address them are stretched thin. Public health agencies and under strain, and community organizations driving equity-focused change are under attack. Our work is key to bridging this gap, clarifying the laws that shape public health and empower advocates to act with confidence and impact.

With philanthropic support, the Network is able to provide high-quality legal and policy expertise to community-based organizations, small projects, and under-resourced jurisdictions that could not otherwise access it; deeper, customized assistance, including multi-jurisdictional research, analyses, policy development; and sustained technical assistance.

Philanthropic partnership also allows us to expand our capacity to respond to growing demand nationwide. Every dollar invested amplifies the impact of those working to improve and protect health in communities, turning law and policy into real action that advances equity, and can save lives.

We need your support to expand this essential work and ensure that communities everywhere can build a healthier, more just future.

To join this effort, contact our Executive Managing Director Ann Phi-Wendt at aphiwendt@networkforphl.org.

Our partners:

American Heart Association.

APHA
American Public Health Association

Arnold Ventures

Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health

CDC Foundation

CSG The Council of State Governments

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East Side Health & Well-Being Collaborative

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