**Public Health – Mississippi’s first line of defense**

In Mississippi, and across the country, we celebrate National Public Health Week (NPHW) the first full week of April each year. This week is a time to recognize the contributions of public health and highlight issues that are important to improving our nation’s health. The Mississippi Public Health Association (MPHA) is a non-profit membership driven community of advocates and professionals committed to keeping Mississippi healthy and safe. We support NPHW in our state by bringing awareness to public health successes, acting as a positive voice for the culture of health in Mississippi and helping encourage places where we live, work, worship and play to have positive influences on our health and life expectancy.

At this time of crisis in our country and state, we rely, more than we have in our lifetime, on the public health infrastructure to protect us and to act as our *First Line of Defense.* MPHA has been a voice for public health for over 80 years in advocacy, education and leadership. We advocate for a strong public health system. The organization informs others that public health is broad and includes many health partners and groups. The members and supporters of MPHA also believe that the health of our state and nation requires investment and support from us all. Today, we see why it is an essential piece of our overall healthcare system.

The successes and efforts of public health are too often taken for granted. As we brush our teeth with clean water, as we serve safe milk to our child and leave them with a licensed day care center, as we eat our meals in an inspected restaurant or visit a family member in a licensed hospital or nursing home, and when a disaster such as Hurricane Katrina and the Gulf Oil Spill occur and emergency healthcare providers quickly respond to us, public health plays a significant role.

These actions and many more are in place to protect us, our families and our communities. Every day, public health touches our lives but most do not perceive it as a valued component of our healthcare system. Public health is not just at work when there is a health crisis or emergency. It is usually not at the forefront of the daily news or our thought process, but it is always there working to protect us and promote our health. In Mississippi and across the country, our current public health infrastructure is fragile and requires of all our support.

As we plainly see today, public health is also an economic issue. We should all take personal and community responsibility for our health and have a statewide system with a strong public health infrastructure. This will economically benefit the entire state. Prevention must be at the forefront of conversations and actions. Funding should go towards public health services and prevention services that can help prevent many
chronic and acute conditions. When we can prevent diseases in our communities, it has a positive financial impact on our health care systems and the state's economy.

During NPHW, our week to recognize our valuable public health professionals across the state and promote the public health profession, we strongly point out that each of you is part of the public health system. You are being called on to take actions to protect your health, your family’s health and your communities’ health. We urgently ask you to follow CDC and Mississippi Department of Health guidance, practice safe hygiene, and physically distance yourself from others at all times.

Lastly, we ask you to join us as we thank the hundreds of public health professionals and all levels of our health care providers, for the work they are doing today...and every day to protect us all. Please continue to support a stronger public health system moving forward!

Charles Buddy Daughdrill
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