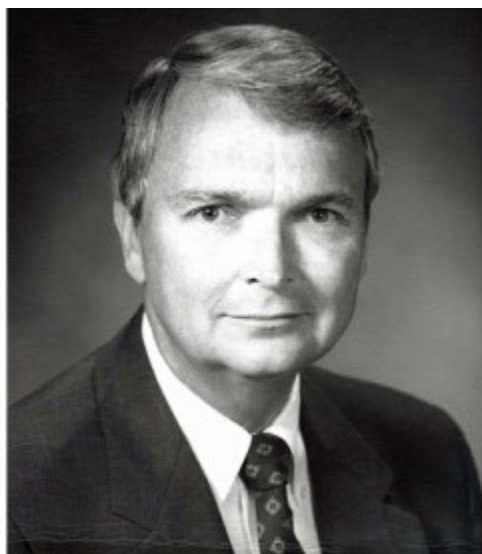




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**THE MISSISSIPPI PUBLIC HEALTH ASSOCIATION  
MOURNS THE LOSS OF DR. ALTON B. COBB**



**Jackson, MS (October 18, 2021):** The Mississippi Public Health Association (MPHA) mourns the loss of Dr. Alton B. Cobb, former Mississippi State Health Officer, and lifetime member of MPHA. Dr. Cobb died at his home on October 14, 2021. He would have been 93 years old on October 19, 2021.

Dr. Cobb served as Mississippi State Health Officer from 1973-1993 and was instrumental in the development of the state's first public health programs for diabetes, hypertension and nursing home quality of care, a centralized WIC/formula distribution system, introduction of directly observed therapy for TB, and led the state to one of the highest immunization completion rates in the country. He was the recipient of numerous national public health and humanitarian awards, including the Arthur T. McCormack Award from the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials and the Award for Excellence from the American Public Health Association.

“Dr. Cobb not only left his mark on the health of Mississippians, but he fostered a love of public health in many of us early in our careers. Several of his former staff have become public health leaders in other states and at the national and federal

levels. Dr. Cobb's influence lives on in the work that others are doing today – all across Mississippi and the country,” stated Dr. Kaye Bender, current executive director of MPHA and President-Elect of the American Public Health Association. Dr. Bender served as a local staff nurse and later the Director of Public Health Nursing and Chief of Staff under Dr. Cobb's leadership .

“Our state has lost a true public health giant,” said Dr. B.J. Phillips, who served as Director of the Mississippi State Department of Health (MSDH) Office of Health Regulation during the time that Dr. Cobb was State Health Officer. A champion for most vulnerable, Dr. Cobb also increased patient protections in nursing homes, strengthened licensure regulations for home health care, and instituted a statewide emergency medical services system.

Dr. Mary Currier, Mississippi State Health Officer from 2010-2018, recalled Dr. Cobb's work in public health . “I remember Dr. Cobb as a professional mentor and a personal friend. His long tenure as State Health Officer was marked by a genuine concern for the health of all Mississippians. He was instrumental in developing the Mississippi Medicaid program, providing access to healthcare for people in this State who would otherwise go without. He will be greatly missed.” During Dr. Cobb's time as State Health Officer, Dr. Currier worked in MSDH clinics taking care of pregnant women, infants, and family planning patients and then later in the Office of Communicable Disease.

Dr. Claude Earl Fox, who served with Dr. Cobb at the MSDH and then later as Alabama State Health Officer; US Public Health Service Regional Health Administrator; Deputy Assistant Secretary of Health and Director of the Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion in the US Department of Health and Human Services; and as Administrator of the Health Resources and Services Administration, reflected on the impact that Dr. Cobb had on his career. “I worked for Dr. Cobb in several capacities during my tenure in public health as many other MPHA members have. It was not until I arrived in Alabama as State Health Officer that I realized how much I had learned from him. I leaned heavily on that knowledge while in that position for six years as well as in my later federal career. He had a unique understanding for health care financing that few others had or were able to use to maximize public health revenues and practice.”

“Dr. Cobb's early work on establishing the Mississippi Medicaid program in 1969 with then Governor John Bell Williams included coverage for pregnant women and their children. This program contributed significantly to the reduction of infant mortality in the state and provided for reimbursement for home and clinic visits by public health nurses,” reflected Terry Beck, who served as the Chief of the Bureau of Personal Health Services under Dr. Cobb.

In 2014, when MPHA bestowed Dr. and Mrs. Cobb with Lifetime Memberships in the association, Buddy Daughdrill, then executive director of MPHA, said of the Cobbs, “They made a positive impact on the lives of many Mississippians through their contributions to public health and their community” . “ In reflecting

on the loss of Dr. Cobb, Daughdrill said, “He will forever be remembered for his leadership, his lifelong commitment to public service, and his vast contributions to public health. He was special to me as I know he was to others. He gave this 29 year old a chance that led to a long career in public health, and I am increasingly grateful.”.

MPHA extends its sympathy to Ms. Mary Cobb, who served as his partner in championing public health, and the entire family of children, grand-children, and great-grandchildren. We know that his family was the light of his life. He leaves a wonderful legacy in them.

MPHA plans to honor Dr. Cobb’s legacy at its conference in the spring 2022.

### **ABOUT MPHA**

Since 1937, the Mississippi Public Health Association (MPHA) has strived to strengthen public health in Mississippi through leadership, advocacy, and education. MPHA provides its members with professional development and networking opportunities while also serving as the voice of public health in Mississippi.

As an active affiliate of the American Public Health Association, MPHA works to maintain state and local funding for essential health programs and to provide an adequate and well-trained public health workforce. MPHA advocates for improved policies and activities that serve to promote healthier outcomes and healthier Mississippi communities.

To learn more about Mississippi Public Health Association, visit [www.mspha.org](http://www.mspha.org).

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