



**MS Public Health Association**  
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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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### **Mississippi Public Health Association Names Lydia West as New Executive Director**

**Jackson, MS** — The Mississippi Public Health Association (MPHA) is pleased to announce the appointment of **Lydia West, MPH, RDN, LD, SNS**, as its new Executive Director, effective **July 1, 2025**.

A Jackson native and graduate of Murrah High School, West brings more than two decades of diverse experience in public health, nutrition, and education to her new role. She earned her bachelor's degree in human sciences with an emphasis in food, nutrition, and dietetics from Mississippi State University in 2002, followed by a master's degree in public health from Tulane University in 2010. Most recently, she has served as president-elect of MPHA and has been a longtime leader within the association.

West's career includes leadership roles with the Mississippi State Department of Health and the Mississippi Department of Education, where she played a vital role in interpreting federal regulations for school lunch programs and implementing statewide initiatives to promote nutrition and physical activity. In 2013, she founded a consulting company dedicated to improving health outcomes through nutrition education and wellness initiatives. Her commitment to lifelong learning led her to earn an associate's degree in culinary arts technology from Hinds Community College in 2016, further deepening her expertise in food systems and recipe development.

"Lydia brings a powerful combination of deep public health expertise, statewide leadership, and a long-standing commitment to MPHA," said Danielle Fastring, PhD, MS, MPH, the current MPHA president. "With experience spanning multiple sectors and a passion for advancing public health, Lydia has already proven herself to be a thoughtful leader and tireless advocate for our mission. Her years of service on our board and committees reflect her strong roots in our organization and her readiness to guide us forward".

As she steps into the Executive Director role, West will step down from her position as president-elect of MPHA. To ensure continuity, the MPHA Board of Directors has voted to

extend President Fastring's term through the 2026 calendar year. A new president-elect will be selected by the membership during MPHA's Annual Conference in the fall 2025.

MPHA also extends heartfelt appreciation to Kaye Bender, PhD, RN, FAAN, who will retire from her role as Executive Director. Dr. Bender's tenure has been marked by visionary leadership, clarity, and compassion, earning her widespread respect across Mississippi and the national public health community.

"Dr. Bender has been a trusted voice and guiding presence within MPHA and beyond," President Fastring said. "Her contributions to our organization have been immeasurable, and the foundation she has helped build will continue to shape our work for years to come. We congratulate her on a well-earned retirement and thank her for the wisdom, dedication, and heart she has shared with us all."

MPHA looks forward to a new chapter under Lydia West's leadership and remains committed to advancing health equity and public health in every Mississippi community.

"It is an honor to step into the role of Executive Director of MPHA. I have big shoes to fill, and also our leadership has built a strong foundation for our organization. I look forward to advancing public health in Mississippi through MPHA's pillars of leadership, education, and advocacy, as MPHA moves into our 9<sup>th</sup> decade", said West. The community of public health professionals across the state has a strong voice for health in Mississippi. West plans to amplify that voice through MPHA's values of courage, professionalism, learning, excellence, diversity, and ethics.

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