

Breakout Session Descriptions and Presenters

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Wednesday, Oct. 29

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Wednesday, Oct. 29

Breakout sessions 1 | 11 a.m. – 12:15 p.m.

1A: Storytelling for Capacity Building

Amy Smith, Supervisor, Public Health Preparedness Consultants, MDH Emergency Preparedness and Response Division; Mickey Scullard, Preparedness and Response Coordinator, MDH Emergency Preparedness and Response Division

Location: Governor's Room

Storytelling is a powerful method of capturing experiences. Using the COVID-19 response, LPH and MDH professionals talked about experiences not routinely included in progress reports and after-action reports. MDH conducted two storytelling projects, gathering topic-specific response experiences from LPH and general response experiences from MDH staff. Using qualitative data analysis methods, identified themes created promising and best practices fact sheets, case studies, exercise injects, and unexpectedly, a story book and card game. A qualitative data analysis exercise with Legos will illustrate how stories become data and turn into useful capacity building products.

1B: Communicating the Power of Public Health

Chera Sevcik and Vlada Gladis, Human Services of Faribault and Martin Counties; Lisa Putrah-Independent Contractor

Location: Lakeside A

This session will share lessons from the Collaborative for Rural Public Health Innovation (CRPHI) communications team; Power of Public Health campaign to educate residents about the value and role of public health in communities. Sharing the process of developing core public health messages using communications best practices and how we've used this campaign to engage with our communities and create inclusive messaging. The communications campaign messages have been distributed through social media, billboards, at community events, and through CRPHI's website; www.powerofpublichealthmn.com.

1C: Trauma-informed Community Cohort: Building a Cross-Jurisdictional Collaboration with Community

Emma Wolf, Trauma-Informed Organizational Change Project Manager, Hennepin County Public Health; Jen O'Brien, Community Health Improvement Partnership Manager, Hennepin County Public Health; Margaret Schuster - Senior Planning Analyst, Minneapolis Health Department

Location: Lakeside B

The Trauma-Informed Community Cohort (TICC) was a nine-month collaborative pilot project between Minneapolis Health Department, Hennepin County Public Health, and 7 community-based organizations focused on illuminating community wisdom to transform public health systems. Highlighting this innovative, co-created effort as a case study, presenters will share replicable strategies, tools, and practices to facilitate trauma-informed, community-driven collaboration. Attendees will participate in hands-on collaborative learning methods that can be adapted to their own work. Together, we'll wrestle with what it means to work in emergence and ambiguity, navigate power dynamics, and truly co-create with community.

1D: Addressing Health Impacts from Climate Change: How Partnerships Advance Health Equity and Increase Organizational Capacity

Climate & Health Team - Saint Paul-Ramsey County Public Health: Uriel Rosales-Tlatenchi, Outreach & Engagement Lead; Gregory Goodwine, Cities Capacity Builder; Nicholai Jost-Epp, Resilience Hub Coordinator & Data Analyst

Location: Pelican Room

The Climate and Health team addresses the negative health impacts of climate change in Ramsey County by acknowledging historic and current inequities, implementing projects that build equity and adaptive capacity in Ramsey County communities and collaborating to break down barriers. We will share projects including an extreme heat tabletop exercise developed in collaboration with a community organization, collaborating with cities on planning, and developing resources in response to community concerns about pollution. Attendees will learn from examples of collaborating to address inequitable impacts of climate change, gain insight on how to actualize collaborative opportunities, and gain knowledge of supportive tools.

Breakout sessions 2 | 1:45 to 2:45 p.m.

2A: Brave Space, Real Talk: Leading Open Dialogue in Public Health

Elizabeth Moe, Principal Consultant, Freya + Co; Annie Halland,

Location: Lakeside A

This interactive session equips participants to lead brave conversations about race, identity, and power using the C.L.A.R.A. method (Calm, Listen, Affirm, Respond, Add). Set in a horseshoe layout, the session begins with a live demonstration of a CLARA-modeled dialogue on a controversial topic, followed by group reflection and peer practice. Participants then engage in dyad conversations from opposing viewpoints, practicing CLARA in real time. The session concludes with a full-group debrief exploring emotional responses, practical application, and challenges. Attendees leave with tools to facilitate hard conversations with empathy, accountability, and clarity in their own communities or teams.

2B: Staff Engagement in Public Health Ethics

Melanie Countryman, Supervisor, Health Strategy; Natalie Vasilj, Public Health Coordinator

Location: Whitebirch

In 2024, Dakota County Public Health re-envisioned the department's ethics process and launched a new approach in 2025. The new process includes these unique elements: annual refresher training for staff, quarterly ethics deliberations, and random selection of deliberation team ("jury style"). The benefits to this approach are: all staff learn about ethical issues and deliberation, issues are deliberated from a diverse set of perspectives, and service commitment is short-term. Staff who have participated in deliberations have shared positive feedback with their peers, which has increased staff engagement and interest in the process.

2C: Strengthening Ties, Expanding Impact: A Story of Partnership with the Upper Sioux Community

Ashlie Wubben, Countryside Public Health SHIP & Emergency Preparedness; Dawn Bjorgan, Countryside Public Health Emergency Preparedness

Location: Lakeside B

Rooted in mutual respect and shared goals, Countryside Public Health's partnership with the Upper Sioux Community exemplifies what it means to be united in passion and purpose. What began as focused collaboration in Emergency Preparedness and the Statewide Health Improvement Partnership has grown into a dynamic, cross-sector relationship that now spans additional public health programs and partnerships across Yellow Medicine County and beyond. In this breakout session, participants will learn how this partnership was built, nurtured, and expanded. Presenters will share practical strategies, lessons learned, and local examples of how prioritizing authentic relationships can lead to sustainable public health outcomes. This session will inspire you to think beyond traditional silos and foster deeper collaboration with communities.

2D: Equity in Action: Tools and Strategies for Community Health Assessments

Spencer Crawford, Public Health Planner, Nicollet County Public Health; Kiona Hermanson, Community Health Strategist, Countryside Public health

Location: Pelican Room

This session will provide practical strategies for advancing equity in community health assessments through inclusive listening sessions and issue prioritization. Presenters will share tools and lessons learned from their own work, including an "Equity-Driven Listening Session 101," how to analyze qualitative data without software, and a novel scoring rubric designed for use by community champions. Attendees will leave with actionable ideas to strengthen trust, deepen engagement, and elevate voices in a scalable manner that works for small and large communities alike.

2E: From Data to Action: Engaging Partners and the Public to Drive Impactful Public Health Campaigns

Matt Flory, Associate Director, State Partnerships, American Cancer Society; Jennifer Johnson, MDH Sage Programs Community Engagement Specialist; Carlie Koberstine, Coordinator, MDH Sage Program

Location: Governor's Room

Presenting a collaborative campaign model that is adaptable to other health conditions. Southwest Minnesota faces the highest breast cancer mortality rate in the state. This campaign increased awareness and access to breast cancer screening and resulted in a 17% improvement of screening numbers compared to the rest of Minnesota, through building and strengthening relations between the Minnesota Department of Health, American Cancer Society, local public health, tribal health, health systems, insurance providers, local media, area breast cancer survivors, and others. Campaign initiatives included targeted media, mobile mammography, and a Partner Toolkit that includes a press release, media templates, and more.

Breakout sessions 3 | 3:15 to 4:30 p.m.

3A: Community Health Workers in Action: Models, Measures, and Momentum Across Minnesota

Kristen Godfrey Walters, MPH, Community Health Worker Initiatives and Community Engagement Director, Health Promotion and Chronic Disease Division, MDH; Bree Allen, MPH, Public Health Supervisor, Nicollet County Health and Human Services; Murugi Mutiga, PhD, MPH, Community Engagement Supervisor, Washington County Community Services/Public Health; Lia Roberts, DNP, PHN, RN, Public Health Supervisor, Dakota County; Fatuma Adam, Community Health Worker, Dakota County Public Health

Location: Whitebirch

MDH will share findings from the 2024 CHW Environmental Scan and introduce the 2025 CHW Infrastructure Sustainability Plan, Logic Model, and Measurement Plan to advance CHWs as a health equity workforce in MN. The session features a panel of CHW programs from local public health (LPH) agencies highlighting CHW program models, financing and implementation strategies. Panelists will highlight successes, challenges, and opportunities for scaling CHW programs in various LPH settings. A new video featuring CHWs in LPH will also be shown to illustrate their essential role in advancing health equity and community connection.

3B: Say What You Mean: How effective messaging and narrative strategies can avoid word triggers, create understanding, and invite connection

Jenna Olson, Public Health Communications Coordinator, Carlton-Cook-Lake-St. Louis Community Health Board; Lyndsey Reece, MDH Southeast Minnesota Health Equity Networks Coordinator; Fa Youb, MDH Central Minnesota Health Equity Networks Coordinator; Colleen McKinney, MDH Northeast Minnesota Health Equity Networks Coordinator

Location: Pelican Room

We all know that words have the power to connect or to trigger. Values-based messages shape public consciousness, impact our collective sense of responsibility and create possibilities. Narrative can contribute to inclusion and connection, build confidence, and bring about change. The Health Equity Networks team will present information on values-based messaging, use of narrative, and strategies to avoid triggering words and promote effective communications. The session will also spotlight the work of Jenna Olson, Public Health Communications Coordinator, Carlton-Cook-Lake-St. Louis Community Health Board, who will share her research and experience in creating effective and responsive communications in public health settings.

3C: Bloomington Community Brain Health Services: A Collaborative Approach to Community Crisis Response

Lucas Campbell, MA LAMFT, Administrative Supervisor, Bloomington Community Brain Health Services; Janet Yeats, MA LMFT, Clinical Supervisor, Bloomington Community Brain Health Services

Location: Governor's Room

In response to increasing numbers of mental health crisis and opioid overdose calls, Bloomington Police Chief Hodges implemented a plan to respond to the need for affordable brain health services in the community. Two licensed marriage and family therapists were hired to develop and co-supervise the program. In December 2023, in partnership with Bloomington Public Health and Police Department, the Bloomington Community Brain Health Services (BCBHS) program began offering free therapy services to Bloomington residents. This presentation will provide background on program development and implementation, how the program is supported and funded, and outcomes and suggestions for replication.

3D: Connecting with Community through Data

Liz Radel Freeman, Contracted Evaluator, NorthStar Data Partners; Maria Bonilla, Public Health Program Coordinator Washington County Public Health & Environment; Caroline McCourt, Public Health Planner and PHEP Coordinator, Health and Human Services of Faribault and Martin Counties

Location: Lakeside A

We will share practical tips and strategies for using data to engage with residents in a variety of settings. While we love our findings, this presentation is focused on the process and tools used in data collection. Examples will be drawn from: Washington County's Healthy Opportunities for People through Equity (HOPE) work in the Latino community in Landfall, Minnesota. We surveyed community leaders and examined change over time in their self-reported leadership skills and trust in government services. Watonwan County and Washington County's community engagement efforts to inform each county's Community Health Assessment. Faribault and Martin Counties' Opioid Settlement Assessment. Through focus groups and surveys, residents with lived experience and professionals that work with individuals with substance use disorder used data to determine opioid settlement spending priorities.

3E: Artificial Intelligence in Public Health—Ensuring Equity and Justice in the Age of Innovation

Dr. Robsan Halkeno Tura, Assistant Commissioner MDH

Location: Lakeside B

Artificial intelligence is rapidly transforming public health, promising smarter surveillance, analytics, and resource deployment. But without a deliberate focus on equity and justice, AI can reinforce and even accelerate health disparities—especially for marginalized, Tribal, and underserved communities. Too often, conversations center on the technology itself, overlooking who might be left behind. This presentation addresses that gap by examining real-world examples of algorithmic bias, data poverty, and the digital divide, and by spotlighting equity-focused frameworks and strategies. We explore how public health leaders can ensure AI is a tool for inclusion and justice, not another gatekeeper.

Thursday, Oct. 30

Breakout sessions 4 | 9:00 to 10:00 a.m.

4A: High Flyers: Building Strong Grantee-Funder Relationships

Kristen Tharaldson, Community Initiatives Coordinator, MDH; Patricia Wilson, Director of Programs, Way to Grow

Location: Pelican Room

This session will explore the unique relationship dynamics between non-profit (grantee) and state health department (funder) staff. A strong partnership built on mutual trust and a shared vision enables family home visitors to reach their highest potential and be at their best when serving families.

4B: Reaching Rural: Building Public Health Communications through Relationships

Andrea Mills, Communications Specialist, Countryside Public Health, Caitlyn VanDamme, Communications Specialist, Southwest Health and Human Services, Erin Schwab, Health Educator and Planner, Brown County Public Health

Location: Governor's Room

Join three rural Minnesotan public health communications for 60-minute interactive session on how relationship-building can strengthen communication efforts and support healthier communities. This presentation is aimed toward public health communication staff and their supervisors who, by the end of the session, will be able to identify their agency's internal and external partners and form personalized strategies to build trust and engagement that will

benefit their communication plan. Communication teams will be able to maximize their roles despite limited time, funding, and resources.

4C: Lightening the load through the Collaborative for Rural Public Health Innovation

Vlada Gladis, Human Services of Faribault and Martin Counties; Liz Radel Freeman-NorthStar Data Partners; Lisa Putrah-Independent Contractor

Location: Lakeside A

The Collaborative for Rural Public Health Innovation (CRPHI) brings together 25 counties in South Central and Southwest Minnesota and students and faculty from Minnesota State University-Mankato. Launched by a Minnesota Infrastructure Fund grant in July 2024, CRPHI connects public health leaders and line staff across the regions with the goal of more efficiently meeting foundational public health responsibilities. We will share how our Communications and Assessment and Surveillance workgroups have guided the collaborative's work, successes, and shared resources and reduced duplication of efforts from our first full year of the grant cycle.

4D: Speaking of Cannabis

Jenna Olson, Public Health Communications Coordinator, Carlton-Cook-Lake-St. Louis Community Health Board; Mary Parsatoon, Public Health Planner, Carlton-Cook-Lake-St. Louis Community Health Board; Maggie Myers, Public Health Educator, St. Louis County Public Health

Location: Lakeside B

Speaking of Cannabis is a regional communications campaign developed with input from 6 public health jurisdictions. It empowers parents, mentors, and other adults with kids in their lives to...

- Understand how cannabis can affect the developing brain.
- Start effective conversations with youth about not using cannabis.
- Practice safe storage, for adults who use cannabis.

We'll share the process and strategies behind the campaign and talk about how foundational public health capabilities can be activated through collaboration. You can also gain access to a ready-to-use toolkit—adaptable for your community—to educate and empower adults to support cannabis misuse prevention.