

2021 MPHA Awardees

The Paul & Sheila Wellstone Public Health Achievement Award

Jackie Dionne, Director, American Indian Health, Minnesota Department of Health

Jackie Dionne is a longtime advocate for Minnesota's American Indian tribes and American Indian communities in Minnesota. She is an enrolled member of the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa in North Dakota. She is the first and only person to serve as the Director of American Indian Health/Tribal Liaison at the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) since its inception and has served in this position since 2012. She graduated from the University of Minnesota (UMN) in Early Childhood Education.

Her current role as American Indian Health Director is to serve as a bridge and advocate between tribal partners and MDH. There are 11 tribes in Minnesota as well as significant populations of American Indians in Minneapolis, St. Paul, Duluth, and other urban areas throughout the state. Her position exists to provide a point of contact for tribes, American Indian communities, and MDH to recognize the unique statuses of tribes with the state of Minnesota— a government to government relationship as well as support tribal communities in Minnesota. One important role of her position is to provide support, technical assistance, and coaching within MDH and advise on engaging with tribal communities. Over the course of her tenure at MDH, the American Indian Health Director/Tribal Liaison has become a solid, consistent, and influential force within MDH. Jackie, the lone staff in this area worked internally to ensure the tribal/American Indian perspective and needs are included in all public health activity.

Through this work, Jackie serves as a critical resource throughout the agency and there are few MDH activities that Jackie has not touched or influenced in her position at MDH.

Albert Justus Chesley Award

Annie Halland, County Manager, UCare

Annie Halland has always been energized by fighting for the marginalized individuals and communities. She started her career at Health Care for the Homeless in St. Paul, where she advocated for clients to get the clinical support they needed, including helping clients register for Medical Assistance. She then received her MPH at Boston University with a focus on Health Policy & Management.

In 2011, Annie joined MPHA and signed on as co-chair of the Policy & Advocacy Committee. She has been acting in that capacity for the last 10 years. Annie has organized advocacy activities, including a “Day at the Capitol” , and collaborating with coalitions and organizations to provide advocacy opportunities such as Minnesotans for Healthy Kids coalition, Protect

Minnesota, and Minnesotans for a Smoke Free Generation. Annie has organized and facilitated numerous MPHA conference presentations featuring lawmakers and lobbyists, and sessions including two sessions on gun violence prevention and one on local public health and SHIP funding. Most recently she worked with the Health Equity Committee to organize a pre-conference session around antiracism and health equity advocacy. Those who have worked closely with Annie witness her tireless dedication to taking actions that address social determinants of health. Annie has worked at UCare since 2013 and supports the health plan's efforts to serve its diverse membership through program flexibility and support services tailored to individual needs. Annie's role recently expanded to include overseeing relationships with Tribal/Indian Health Service clinics. She is humbled and grateful for the opportunity to improve outreach and support to tribal entities and focus on reducing barriers for UCare's Indigenous members. Annie has distinguished herself in the field of public health and has contributed significantly to MPHA.

B. Robert Lewis Award

Tim Walz, Governor of Minnesota

Governor Tim Walz was raised by his parents in a small, rural town of Nebraska. His upbringing grounded his values and life in the pursuit of the common good and selfless service. Upon graduation from high school, he enlisted in the Army National Guard and served as a teacher internationally in the People's Republic of China. After 24 years of service, in 2005, he retired as a Command Sergeant Major of the 1-125th Field Artillery Battalion. By 2006, Tim won his first election to the United States House of Representatives. He was re-elected for 5 additional terms and served Minnesota's First Congressional District.

As the 41st Governor of Minnesota, Tim Walz has long pledged to public service throughout his career. Moreover, in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, Governor Walz has demonstrated a strong commitment to protecting the health, safety, and well-being of Minnesotans. From the start, he responded to the pandemic by declaring a peacetime emergency on March 13, 2020 and worked closely with public health officials to limit mass gatherings and to call for physical distancing. Using a data and research driven approach, he closely monitored key metrics, including deaths, hospitalizations, daily case numbers, and test positivity rates, and analyzed data showing where the largest rates of transmission were occurring to inform the path forward. Based on the evolving scientific understanding of the conditions that contributed to the transmission of COVID-19 in community, Governor Walz issued executive orders and implemented restrictions as necessary to prioritize and protect public health, while also balancing the personal well-being and the Minnesotan economy. Governor Walz not only acted in accordance with public health expertise, but he also worked to build a collective, unified state through countless press conferences and constant presence on media outlets.

Of note, Governor Walz also took steps to address systemic racism and discrimination. On his second day in office, his first Executive Order established the One Minnesota Council on Inclusion and Equity that is charged with ensuring everyone in Minnesota has an opportunity to thrive.

Governor Walz has put effort into supporting all Minnesotans throughout the public health crisis. The Governor's At-Risk Populations work group has advocated for safe housing for people experiencing homelessness, victims of domestic violence or exploitation and human trafficking, elderly Minnesotans, and others at increased risk of COVID-19. Further, Governor Walz recognized that housing is critical to Minnesotans' health and well-being—especially during a pandemic and time of financial uncertainty. He issued an eviction moratorium to prevent residents from being evicted from their homes due to non-payment and announced the \$100 million Housing Assistance Program as a means to quell eviction and homelessness and assure that Minnesotans are able to maintain housing stability.

Throughout these unprecedented times, Governor Walz has distinguished himself as a public health champion in his efforts to keep Minnesotans safe and address issues of systemic racism and discrimination.

Harvey G. Rogers Environmental Health Leadership Award

Amira Adawe, Executive Director, Beautywell Project

Amira Adawe has been interested in public health since she was a child. She immigrated from Somalia to Minnesota in 2000. Through the years, her desire to support her Twin Cities Somali community grew. This led her to attend the University of Minnesota School of Public Health for her MPH degree. While in school, Amira identified and addressed several issues threatening the health of Somalis, including the use of dangerous skin-lightening creams by many Somali and African women.

During a class on chemical exposure, she was doing a literature review and learned that the skin-lightening products often contain hydroquinone, which can cause birth defects if used by pregnant women. The internationally produced creams are for sale in the Twin Cities and she became concerned that they could harbor other toxic chemicals and poison people here. She voiced her concerns to Ramsey county officials and received their support to gather cream samples and have them analyzed for dangerous ingredients. The results were troubling: 11 of the 27 samples had extremely high levels of mercury, which is widely known to cause significant neurological damage in mothers and babies. The legal limit is 1 part per million and the results reached levels of 33,000 parts per million. When the products they tested showed these high levels of mercury, MDH, MPCA and FDA got involved. The FDA found that a single local seller was supplying the Twin Cities stores with the cremes. It then issued a consumer warning stating

that infants and small children might be exposed to mercury through parents who use the products.

Public health agencies in several major cities had launched their own investigation of tainted skin creams, and they reached out for advice from Admira. She then created the Beautywell Project to combat the stigma faced by women with darker skin and take on the industry promises them beauty in a jar. The Beautywell Project aims to end skin-lightening practices and chemical exposures and create a toxic-free environment. Her dream is that every woman stops using skin-lightening creams and trying to change their color and that they are happy for who they are.

Amira also worked at MDH to launch a biomonitoring study with HealthPartners and other organizations to screen Hmong, Latina, and white people receiving prenatal care in Mpls and St. Paul for lead and cadmium exposure. Amira was a 2020 Bush Fellow and is an instructor at the Twin Cities University School of Public Health, Division of Environmental Health Science teaching the environmental justice and a policy and practice course at the Public Health Institute.

Student Achievement Award

Delaine Anderson, University of Minnesota, School of Public Health

Delaine is a first-year student in the University of Minnesota's School of Public Health Maternal and Child Health Program.

Delaine joined MPHA as a student member in August of 2020 around the time she relocated to Minnesota for graduate school. After previously living in Alabama and California, moving to a different state during the Covid-19 pandemic, in the middle of a socially-distanced-everything, was surely not an easy way to acclimate into a new community!

Delaine quickly demonstrated her leadership skills by researching and taking advantage of a number of opportunities in Minnesota including: a primary role with her school's Maternal and Child Health Interest Group, joining MPHA and becoming an engaged committee member, building social media outreach for a local church, interning at the Minnesota Department of Health in the Pregnancy Risk Assessment & Monitoring System and connecting with the Twin Cities Medical Society as a policy & advocacy intern, just to name a few extracurricular pieces outside of her academic schedule.

Throughout Delaine's public health activities, she brings an empathetic, inclusive, and logical perspective to her work. Delaine's ethics are grounded in social justice and racial equity, and she has thoughtfully raised important issues for consideration during her committee work. She has an engaging communication style and one of her most valuable strengths is synthesizing multiple issues into logical steps to reach team goals.