INTRODUCTION

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Abstract: The National Public Health Law Conference: People. Policy. Progress., held October 2023, brought together more than 400 stakeholders in public health to explore how law and policy can be leveraged to advance health equity, improve data sharing for community health, protect access to reproductive health and facilitate system change.

In October 2023, the Network for Public Health Law, with generous support from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Health Forward Foundation, M Health Fairview, and Amazon Web Services, organized the National Public Health Law Conference People. Policy. Progress., in Minneapolis, Minnesota. This symposium issue of the *Journal of Law, Medicine & Ethics (JLME)* is dedicated to an examination of some of the critical topics discussed at this conference.

Health is shaped by a myriad of determinants including access to quality health care, stable housing, culturally appropriate and nutritious food, safe environments, and employment. Structural racism, ableism, misogyny and discrimination against the LGBTQ community and others, along with other forms of discrimination, create barriers to equitable health outcomes. Momentum has been building in public health to change systems to reduce or eradicate the negative health effects of discrimination and to improve health by addressing these determinants of health as core work. Success requires a diverse set of collaborators, with federal, tribal, state, and local laws and policies playing an integral role. The Conference's more than 40 sessions explored law and policy pathways to achieving these goals.

Over 400 stakeholders in public health, including public health officials, administrators, and practitioners; lawyers; researchers; and leaders of community-based organizations as well as foundation representatives, joined their fellow colleagues at the conference to explore how law and policy can be leveraged to advance health equity, improve data sharing for community health, protect access to reproductive health, and facilitate system change. Attendees heard from national leaders and key experts working to advance health and health equity.

Minnesota Senator Amy Klobuchar gave the opening address, emphasizing the critical role that evidence-based law and policy play in advancing needed changes nationally, and how the work of those attending is foundational to those efforts.

LaCora Bradford Kesti, Vice President of Community Impact, Women's Foundation of Minnesota, **Matthew Pierce**, Senior Program Officer, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and **Rocio Córdoba**, Executive Director, Funders for Reproductive Equity, joined the plenary session, "The Philanthropy Factor: Supporting Health and Well-Being in Communities," for a discussion of how philanthropic organizations are prioritizing investments to help Americans achieve better health outcomes.

The closing plenary, "Strengthening Protections and Advocating for the Public's Health," moderated by

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Dr. Umair A. Shah, Secretary of Health, Washington State Department of Health, included a conversation with **Attica Scott**, Director, Special Projects, Forward Justice Action Network and former Kentucky State Representative, **Donna E. Levin**, Director, Act for Public Health, Network for Public Health Law, **Jake Williams**, CEO, Healthier Colorado, and **Martha Katz**, Chair, James F. and Sarah T. Fries Foundation, for a discussion of the current environment surrounding public health and what is at stake for public health practitioners, officials and policy makers, and the communities they serve.

Pre-conference workshops provided insight and guidance on policy recommendations and implementation strategies for anti-racism efforts; addressing public health communication challenges using a health and racial equity lens; communication tools and tactics to advance policies to protect public health's authority to keep communities safe and healthy; law and policy strategies to mitigate the adverse and inequitable health impacts of climate change; and facilitating data sharing between Tribal Epidemiology Centers and public health.

Forty sessions offered attendees opportunities to connect and share current work and ideas for addressing health equity and systems change through law. This Symposium issue includes a selection of manuscripts examining critical issues in all five conference tracks: (1) access to reproductive health care; (2) addressing structural inequities; (3) pressing and emerging issues; (4) the role of law in facilitating system change, and (5) the use of public health data to improve community health.

On behalf of the conference planning committee and attendees, I want to express our sincere thanks to the plenary speakers and presenters for sharing their knowledge, insights, and expertise in such critical areas of public health law. My deep appreciation goes to Network for Public Health Law staff for their outstanding assistance in organizing the sessions and workshops, and to the conveners of workshops and concurrent sessions for helping to make the conference such a success:

Sabrina Adler, J.D., Vice President, ChangeLab Solutions**; Chris Alibrandi O'Connor**, J.D., Deputy Director, Mid-States Region, Network for Public Health Law; **Prashasti Bhatnagar**, J.D., M.P.H, Law/Public Health Postdoctoral Scholar, Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity, The Ohio State University; and Faculty Affiliate, The Institute for Healing Justice & Equity, Saint Louis University; **Felice Borisy Rudin**, J.D., Ph.D., Assistant Professor, Department of Pharmacology and Toxicology and Policy Analyst, Wisconsin Alcohol Policy Project at the Comprehensive Injury Center, Medical College of Wisconsin; **Kate Boulton**, J.D., M.P.H, Senior Legal Technical Advisor, Vital Strategies Overdose Prevention; **Scott Burris**, J.D., Professor of Law and Director of the Center for Public Health Law Research, Temple Law School; Professor, School of Public Health, Temple University; **Corey Davis**, J.D., M.S.P.H., Director, Harm Reduction, Network for Public Health Law; **Jordan de Jong**, Ph.D., Faculty Research Associate, Center for Applied Research and Evaluation, Women's Health, East Tennessee State University; **Michael Ellsworth**, J.D., M.P.A., Federal Relations Director, Washington State Department of Health; **Heather Erb**, J.D., Principal, Heather Erb, PLLC; **Alexis Etow**, J.D., Managing Director, ChangeLab Solutions; **Abigail Ferrell**, J.D. M.P.A., Public Health Analyst, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; **Carrie Field**, M.P.H., Policy Analyst, National Indian Health Board; **Benjamin Geffen**, J.D., Senior Attorney, Public Interest Law Center; **Adrienne Ghorash**, J.D., Lead Law and Policy Analyst, Center for Public Health Law Research, Temple University; **Richard Gold**, J.D. Consultant, Affordable Intelligence for Social Policy; **Colleen Healy Boufides**, J.D., Co-Director, Mid-States Region, Network for Public Health Law; **Darlene Huang Briggs**, J.D., M.P.H., Deputy Director, Act for Public Health, Network for Public Health Law; **Dawn Hunter**, J.D., M.P.H., Director, Health Equity, Network for Public Health Law; **Iyanrick John**, J.D., M.P.H., Vice President of External Affairs, ChangeLab Solutions; **Jill Kruger**, J.D., Director, Climate and Health, Network for Public Health Law; **Betsy Lawton**, J.D., Deputy Director, Climate and Health, Network for Public Health Law; **Jason Lerner**, J.D., Senior Director, 911 Portfolio, University of Chicago Health Lab; **Donna E. Levin**, J.D., Project Director, Act for Public Health, Network for Public Health Law; **Angela McGowan**, J.D., M.P.H., Senior Director, Alliance for Disease Prevention and Response, American Public Health Association**; Kerri McGowan Lowrey**, J.D., M.P.H., Deputy Director, Eastern Region, Network for Public Health Law; **Mark Meaney**, J.D., M.A., Director, Commercial Tobacco Control Law and Policy, Public Health Law Center; **Madeline Morcelle**, J.D., M.P.H., Senior Attorney, National Health Law Program; **Stephen Murphy**, J.D., Deputy Director, Mid-States Region, Network for Public Health Law; **Aloka Narayanan**, M.P.P., Project Leader, Harvard Kennedy School Government Performance Lab; **Caroline Palmer**, J.D. Director, Safe Harbor, Minnesota Department of Health; **Karmann Peters**, Manager,

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Community Partnerships, Whole Woman's Health Alliance; **Aaron D. Peterson**, Director, Public Health Informatics, Hennepin County Public Health; **Julie Ralson Aoki**, J.D., Director, Healthy Eating & Active Living Programs, Public Health Law Center; **Sara Rogers**, M.P.H., C.P.H., Public Health Policy Analyst, Health Equity, Network for Public Health Law; **Cason Schmit**, J.D., Assistant Professor, Texas A&M University; **Umair A. Shah**, M.D., M.P.H., Secretary of Health, Washington State; **Charly Shane Gilfoil**, J.D., Staff Attorney, National Health Law Program; **Sarah Somers**, J.D., M.P.H., Legal Director, National Health Law Program; **Joanna Suder**, J.D., Senior Staff Attorney, Reproductive Health, Network for Public Health Law; **Mat Swinburne**, J.D., Associate Director, Eastern Region, Network for Public Health Law; **Lauren Tonti**, J.D. M.P.H., Public Health Analyst, DRT Strategies, Inc; **Melissa Torres Montoya**, J.D., M.P.H., Senior Manager, Lawyer Engagement, If/When/How; **Liwen Zeng**, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, Center for Applied Research and Evaluation, Women's Health, East Tennessee State.

I also extend my sincere gratitude and appreciation to my colleagues at the Network for Public Health Law for their assistance with the conference, and for their work in the careful review and editing of the manuscripts for this issue.

Witnessing the collective power of professionals committed to serving our communities by advancing public health and equity was truly inspiring. I am excited to spearhead the planning for the next Public Health Law Conference in 2025, aiming to further strengthen the Network's pivotal and responsive role in addressing the dynamic challenges of the public health field.

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