# Allegany County Health Planning Coalition
# Meeting Minutes
# September 8, 2026

This meeting was held via Google Meets.

**INDIVIDUALS PRESENT**

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| Melissa Nething, ACHD | Jennifer Smith, ACHD |
| Corey Edmonds, Mountain Laurel Medical Center | Dr. Jennifer Corder, ACHD |
| Diane Donham, CarePoint | Jim Raley, Archway Station |
| Gail Kenner, ACHD | Ellie Folk, ACHD |
| Maureen Lauder, ACHD | Theresa Stahl, ACHD |
| Michele Walker, CUW | Stacey Blank, UPMC |
| Paula Hostetler, Cumberland Housing Group | Tara Wetherell, MPC |
| Sheila Robertson, Tri-State Women's Health | Andy Valentine, WMD Food Council |
| Wendolyn McKenzie, HRDC | Carrie Duckworth, ACHD |
| Annette Wolford, Allegany Radio | Emily Hendershot |
| Christina Rust, ACHD | Haley Guillot, ACHD |
| Joanie Ellsworth, Surgical Center of Western MD | Hetty Trenum, ACHD |
| Joe Caporale, Allegany Radio | Julie Teter, AHEC West |
| Karen Howsare, UPMC | Lisa Beardsley, ACHD |
| Kenzi Mousch, UMD Extension | Lydia Yoder, AHEC West |
| Rosanne Taylor, ACHD | Melissa Clark, AHEC West |
| Paula McKenzie, ACHD | Tracey Leonard, ACPS |
| Kathryn Woods, CarePoint | Tommy Zarembka, Food and Friends |
| Leslye Wooley, Food and Friends | Mike Salvadge, Allegany EMS |
| Lisa Moran, JHHC | Paul Hazlehurst |
| Arin Ahlum Hanson, Maryland Dental Coalition | Sierra Mehlbrech, CarePoint |

## I. INTRODUCTIONS/WELCOME/ANNOUNCEMENTS

Melissa Nething welcomed the participants and confirmed that the meeting was being transcribed for public access.

## II. ADOPT MINUTES OF July 14, 2026

Melissa asked if there were any changes or additions to the July 14, 2026 minutes. There were no responses and Paula McKenzie moved to approve the minutes, and Theresa Stahl seconded the approval. The meeting minutes will be posted on the Allegany Speaks website under our Coalition group.

## III. PRESENTATIONS

**Theresa Stahl, RDN, LDN, FAND, Nutritionist, Allegany County Health Department**
**Andy Valentine, Consultant, Allegany County Health Department and Western Maryland Food Council**
**Paula McKenzie, RN, Director of Nursing/Physical Health, Allegany County Health Department**

In May 2026, ACHD received a grant through the Maryland Department of Health Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Control to survey the community, create a food security report, and launch a food security subcommittee. The Western Maryland Food Council, which consists of Washington, Allegany, and Garrett

counties, was also working on a food assessment using the CARAT tool to create a comprehensive food assessment. Data captured across the United States through food councils was customized by Hood College in Frederick, Maryland and they provided the data for the local report. There were direct surveys, interviews and focus groups targeting pantries, farmers, churches, community schools, senior centers, state offices and nonprofit organizations, all working in food access. This data created a report that is a snapshot of one moment in time that shows our successes and our gaps. Andy Valentine came on board to help do a deeper dive wit this information. The report highlighted assets and infrastructure, and we have nine specific categories that came out of the survey.

- 17 of 22 county schools are designated “Community Schools" with various on-site garden infrastructures, including simple container gardens to raised beds and greenhouses and hydroponic grow systems.
- Nutrition education and workforce development (ACHD, UPMC, Maryland Extension Office, Allegany College, Frostburg State University, high school culinary arts at CCTE)
- Community pantry network, food programs and distributions (16 pantries in Allegany County, local farmers, churches, community schools, college campuses, Western Maryland Food Bank's Cumberland warehouse (the only redistribution organization in the county), Salvation Army, America's Hauling for Hope, Nourishing Neighbors, Appalachian Farm and Food Alliance, Food Council, WIC, SNAP, CSA, the Community Cafe).

Ater the data collection, a clear list of current opportunities, priorities, and ideas were separated into near-term, medium-term, and long-term.

- Short-term 3 to 6 months: expand cold storage for food pantries, launch a formal program that would systematize farmer-to-pantry connections that currently depend on individual relationships; include food system expertise and county planning departments to address structural issues through policy change; develop mobile pantry routes or food delivery partnerships to address the transportation barriers for residents who cannot reach the fixed site pantries and farmer's markets; establish a local food aggregation hub to consolidate purchasing power for institutions while simplifying the logistics for our farmers who currently navigate multiple small scale relationships.
- One to two years: expand public transportation to farmer’s markets, expand community garden space, develop emergency food stockpiling systems to distribute across multiple pantries, and create a local food processing capacity.

The first subcommittee meeting was held on August 20th at the South Cumberland Library with 27 attendees. Of those attendees, more than 33% were participants that were engaged residents living in and around our priority populations. An overview was given of the key report findings and attendees were given paper worksheets with the report recommendations and asked to rank the emerging opportunities and then offer any other recommendations they wanted to discuss in the future.

The written report is in the finalization stage and will be available on different websites, including Allegany Speaks, ACHD's website under the nutrition link, and the Western Maryland Food Council. The next subcommittee meeting at the South Cumberland Library will be Thursday, December 10th at 2:30 and everyone is invited to attend.

**Maryland Oral Health Plan: A Five-Year Roadmap to Improve Oral Health**
**Arin Ahlum Hanson, MPH, Director of Programs, Maryland Dental Action Coalition**
Erin Ahlum Hanson, Director of Programs at the Maryland Dental Action Coalition (MDAC), provided an overview of Maryland's Oral Health Plan for 2026–2030. The plan serves as a roadmap for improving oral health and increasing access to dental care. It was developed collaboratively with the Maryland Department of Health, healthcare professionals, community organizations, and other stakeholders.

Maryland has made significant progress in improving oral health, including expanding adult Medicaid dental coverage, which has provided access to dental care for more than 800,000 Marylanders since 2023. The state Medicaid program has also expanded pregnancy and postpartum dental coverage, strengthened children's oral health initiatives, and maintained high rates of community water fluoridation.

Despite this progress, challenges remain, particularly in rural and underserved communities. Maryland continues to experience dental provider shortages, with practicing dentists decreasing by 5% and dental hygienists decreasing by 10% between 2019 and 2023. Childhood tooth decay is also increasing, with 43% of children experiencing tooth decay during the 2022–2023 school year, compared to 36% in 2015–2016. Geographic and racial disparities in access to dental care also continue to be a concern.

- Dr. Jennifer Corder asked about dental school enrollment and strategies to motivate graduates to serve in rural areas. Arin discussed the "Pathways to Bright Futures" program and MDAC academic scholarships for those committing to dental health professional shortage areas. Andy Valentine inquired about holistic dentistry, to which Arin responded that there is an opportunity for continued education regarding alternative and the science behind oral health practices.

The 2026–2030 plan focuses on three major areas:

- Increasing access to affordable and comprehensive oral health care.
- Promoting oral disease and injury prevention.
- Improving oral health literacy and education.

MDAC will work with community partners and stakeholders to implement the plan, monitor progress, and identify opportunities for collaboration. Organizations are encouraged to review and share the plan, identify how their current work aligns with its goals, and contribute their resources and expertise to support implementation. MDAC also encourages organizations to complete its engagement survey and join its mailing list to stay informed about future opportunities.

Allegany County has played an important role in advancing oral health initiatives in Maryland, including advocacy efforts that contributed to expanded adult Medicaid dental coverage. However, dental provider shortages and limited access to care remain concerns for rural communities. Local organizations and coalitions can support the statewide plan through oral health education, prevention efforts, HPV vaccination initiatives, advocacy, and collaboration with healthcare providers.

Maryland has made important progress in improving oral health access and prevention, but significant disparities and challenges remain. The 2026–2030 Oral Health Plan provides a framework for improving access to care, preventing oral disease, and increasing oral health education. Collaboration between state agencies, healthcare providers, and local community organizations will be essential to improving oral health outcomes across Maryland.

**Open Discussion: Maryland Rural Health Transformation Program, Mobile Health Listening Session**

**Melissa Nething, ACHD**

Melissa Nething provided an overview of the Maryland Rural Health Transformation Program, which is supported by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). The program provides more than $168 million in funding to Maryland, fully funded through CMS/HHS. One of its three main priorities focuses on improving sustainable access to healthcare and innovative services in rural communities, including funding for mobile health programs.

One of the discussion points focused on identifying existing mobile health services that bring healthcare directly to community members in Allegany County. AHEC West has boots on the ground with wound care and harm reduction services. CarePoint Response also provides mobile crisis services focused on behavioral health and substance use services. Mountain Laurel has been awarded a grant from the CHRC for staffing and startup support. They're currently working on funding for the mobile unit. It would function for primary health and behavioral health, and perhaps dental services.

Dr. Corder discussed expanding the definition of mobile health services beyond traditional mobile units or vans. She highlighted the opportunity to provide healthcare education and services outside of traditional healthcare settings, including community locations and college campuses.

A major concern in Allegany County is the low HPV vaccination completion rate among youth. Maryland's statewide completion rate is approximately 69%, while Allegany County's rate is only 47% (2025 data). Low vaccination rates are a concern because HPV is associated with increasing rates of head, neck, and other cancers. ACHD is currently working on an initiative at Allegany College to provide "catch-up" HPV vaccinations. College students will be recruited and trained as peer ambassadors to educate fellow students about the HPV vaccine and its importance in cancer prevention.

Mike Salvadge from Allegany EMS shared that the organization is working to establish a mobile integrated health program to expand healthcare access throughout the community. The initiative has support from UPMC and is currently in the planning and development stages. The proposed program would use a mobile health unit staffed by paramedics, with additional support from healthcare providers depending on the needs of the patient. Allegany EMS previously applied for the first round of grant funding but was not selected. They are waiting for the second round of grant funding to open so they can reapply and continue moving the project forward.

## IV. Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP)

- Melissa requested to move the next CHIP work group meeting from October 20th to October 27th at 3:00 p.m.
- Melissa and Corey are working to update the Coalition's bylaws, which have not been reviewed in quite some time. They hope to present the updated bylaws at the next Coalition meeting, scheduled for November 10th at 1:30 p.m.

## V. LHIC Updates

### Ellie Folk, Director of Cancer & Tobacco Cessation Programs, ACHD

Ellie provided updates on the Cancer Committee/Coalition, which is part of the Cigarette Restitution Fund's CEST Program. The committee focuses on cancer screenings, cancer data, program updates, new initiatives, and community recommendations to improve cancer prevention and early detection throughout Allegany, Washington, and Garrett counties.

The Breast and Cervical Cancer Screening Program (BCCP) had a successful fiscal year 2026, meeting and exceeding all performance measures across the three counties. Looking ahead, the program is preparing for a potential increase in referrals due to upcoming insurance changes.

One area needing improvement is skin cancer screenings, as the program did not meet its performance goal last year. Community partners are encouraged to refer uninsured and underinsured individuals over age 18 for free or supported skin cancer screening services. The program completes the intake process and connects eligible individuals with local dermatologists for full-body skin exams.

MDH is also partnering with Allegany College of Maryland and Johns Hopkins Hospital to increase HPV vaccination rates in the community. September's Gynecological Cancer Awareness Month was highlighted as an opportunity to promote HPV vaccination and cervical cancer screenings. October outreach activities will also focus on breast cancer awareness, including participation in the Making Strides of Western Maryland Breast Cancer Walk on October 10th at Allegany College of Maryland.

- Dr. Corder shared information about another collaboration involving Johns Hopkins Hospital, UPMC Western Maryland, and local physicians focused on ovarian cancer prevention. The initiative will promote awareness and appropriate use of fallopian tube removal as a preventive option for individuals who no longer need their fallopian tubes. This effort is particularly relevant because Allegany County has higher rates of ovarian cancer.

## VI. NEXT MEETING

The next meeting will be held on Tuesday, November 10, 2026 at 1:30 p.m.

## VII. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 2:45 p.m.
Submitted by: Maureen Lauder