

Joan Ellison, RN, MPH, Receives 2014 Maurice “Mo” Mullet Lifetime of Service Award



Joan Ellison, RN, MPH

The National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) is pleased to recognize Joan Ellison, RN, MPH, as this year’s recipient of the Mo Mullet Lifetime of Service Award. This award honors current or former local health officials for noteworthy service to NACCHO that has reflected the commitment, vigor, and leadership exemplified by Mo’s distinguished career.

Joan Ellison’s career in local public health spanned more than 43 years, including 34 years as Public Health Director of the Livingston County (NY) Department of Health. Throughout that time, she devoted herself not only to improving the health of her community but also to working with colleagues at state and national levels to better the field of public health.

Ellison exemplified continuous quality improvement, as evidenced by her work on APEX PH, Mobilizing for Action through Planning and Partnerships (MAPP), and public health department accreditation. So great was her commitment not to



settle for the status quo, for years she and her staff wore buttons with the words “That’s the Way We’ve Always Done It” crossed out with a large red X.

Ellison approached all challenges in public health with a fresh perspective and a willingness to learn. When West Nile Virus first appeared in New York State, local health leaders struggled to come up to speed on understanding the various mosquito vector surveillance needs. Ellison famously said, “I don’t know a Culex from a Q-Tip, but we need to learn if we’re going to protect our communities.” Such graceful humor and willingness to learn typified her approach.

Ellison always approached any negotiation with her partners at the New York State Department of Health with respect and strength, negotiating the first cooperative agreement for bioterrorism funding to ensure that local health departments received the resources they needed to develop and implement public health emergency preparedness and response plans. The foundations of that agreement and the collegial relationship she fostered have ensured state commitment to local public health emergency preparedness efforts through years of federal cuts.

Ellison's work with both the New York State Association of County Health Officials (NYSACHO) and NACCHO has influenced public health professionals nationwide. Her participation in APEX PH, MAPP, and public health department accreditation enhanced the work of local health departments and the public health system as a whole, with the creation and implementation of tools to assess and improve both the operations of local health departments and the health of their communities. One of the first Public Health Accreditation Board (PHAB) beta-site users, the Livingston County Department of Health, under Ellison's leadership, was in the first round of local health departments to receive national public health accreditation. In addition, many health departments in New York State learned about the MAPP tool and used it as their community assessment tool in large part due to Joan's willingness to champion its value and be a resource as they undertook a MAPP process in their communities.

Ellison encouraged her colleagues to collaborate with NYSACHO and NACCHO, recognizing the value in mentoring and supporting one another. Ellison served on six committees at NACCHO, including the board of directors. Her service on the executive committee of NYSACHO from 1993 to 2005 included serving as vice president from 1997 to 1999 and president from 1999 to 2002.

Even in retirement, Ellison has pursued opportunities to advance public health. For example, as a PHAB Site Team Leader, she supports local health departments' efforts to seek national accreditation; she has mentored a new generation of public health leaders by being a coach for NACCHO's Survive and Thrive Program; and she is Vice President of the New York State Maternal and Child Health Block Grant Council.



NACCHO Model Practices

Under Joan Ellison's leadership, the Livingston County Department of Health submitted six applications to NACCHO's Model Practices Program; three were designated as promising practices and three as model practices.



Please join NACCHO in congratulating Joan Ellison for her enduring commitment and service to the field of local public health.

NACCHO

National Association of County & City Health Officials

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The mission of the National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) is to be a leader, partner, catalyst, and voice for local health departments.

1100 17th St, NW, 7th Floor Washington, DC 20036

P 202-783-5550 F 202-783-1583

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