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Local health leaders survey progress at the 2nd Annual Stakeholders Meeting of the Northern Michigan Public Health Alliance

GAYLORD, Mich. – Public health leaders from across the region convened last week in Gaylord for the Annual Stakeholders Meeting of the Northern Michigan Public Health Alliance. The meeting provided an opportunity to reflect on the past accomplishments of the Alliance, survey the current public health landscape, and begin the process of envisioning the next steps for the Alliance over the next three years. Attendees included representatives from local Boards of Health, seven local health departments, two hospitals, two county health plans, and the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services.

A highlight of the day was a remote presentation by John Auerbach, PhD, President and Chief Executive Officer for Trust for America's Health, and former Associate Director for Policy at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Dr. Auerbach discussed the role of public health as Chief Health Strategist, a concept he developed with other public health experts. "It was great to hear Dr. Auerbach talk about our role as Chief Health Strategist," said Denise Bryan, Health Officer for District Health Departments #2 and #4. "It makes sense for Health Departments to take on that role, since our public health perspective puts us in a unique position to view the community holistically. We can bring together diverse partners and create a comprehensive strategy for improving the health of everyone in the community."

Wendy Hirschenberger, Chair of the Alliance Steering Committee and Health Officer for Grand Traverse County Health Department, appreciated the opportunity to bring together so many regional partners in public health. "Convening all the public health partners in the region is essential for strengthening our public health network. It's exciting for all of us to have this chance to collaborate, to work together to continue moving the needle forward on improving health across the whole region now and in the future."

The Northern Michigan Public Health Alliance works to maximize the effectiveness and efficiency of health care delivery in a 25-county region of Michigan's northern Lower Peninsula. Since it was organized, its members have launched several initiatives to address pressing needs

in the community. For example, the Alliance established a Regional Public Health Emergency Preparedness Team for Northwest Michigan counties and created Enroll Northern Michigan to help residents sign up for the Healthy Michigan Plan or insurance coverage on the federal Health Insurance Marketplace.

The Health Department of Northwest Michigan is mandated by the Michigan Public Health Code to promote wellness, prevent disease, provide quality healthcare, address health problems of vulnerable populations, and protect the environment for the residents and visitors of Antrim, Charlevoix, Emmet, and Otsego counties. For additional information about the Northern Michigan Public Health Alliance, call Jane Sundmacher at 231-347-5041 or visit nmhealthalliance.org.



Jane Sundmacher from the Health Department of Northwest Michigan leads a visioning session, beginning the process to create the Alliance's second 3-year strategic plan.