

HEALTH HAPPENINGS

A quarterly newsletter brought to you by Nashoba Associated Boards of Health

Serving the public health needs of Ashburnham, Ashby, Ayer, Berlin, Bolton, Boxborough, Devens, Dunstable, Groton, Harvard, Lancaster, Lunenburg, Pepperell, Shirley, Stow, Townsend, and the community of Devens

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Issue: Winter (February) 2026

Winter 2026

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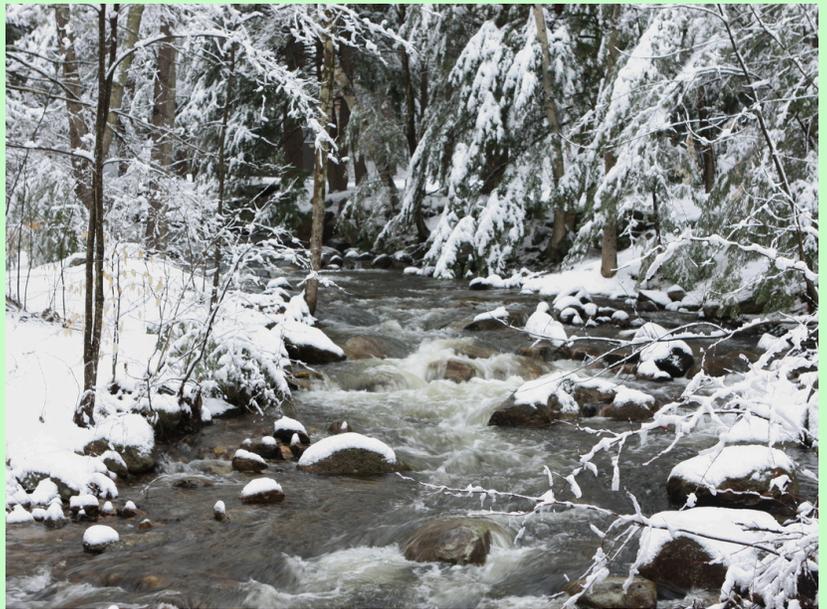
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February is American Heart Month



Above Photo: Snowy stream in Ashby by Bridgette Pontbriand, NABH Senior Food Inspector

We certainly hope everyone is staying warm out there. It has been a bitter winter so far, and we're not out of the woods yet! In extreme cold, remember to check on your vulnerable family members, friends, and community members. If you are in need of a warm place to go during bitter cold, you can check with your local authorities or Call 2-1-1 to find warming centers or shelters near you. We have a lot of great new things to share with our community, including our 2025 community health needs assessment and annual report, our new health equity micro-coalition (the Nashoba HEP), upcoming annual pet rabies clinics, and our new public health nursing team! Speaking of which, please join us in welcoming Sandi Richard, LPN to Nashoba Associated Boards of Health as our newest Public Health Nurse. Visit Sandi and Susie Thompson, RN at our monthly Town Nurse Hour events throughout the health district (re-started in January 2026!)

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Agency Updates- Environmental Division:

The Nashoba Associated Boards of Health (NABH) Environmental Division continues to work directly with our member Boards of Health and residents in our towns, enforcing State Sanitary and Environmental Codes, Massachusetts General Laws, and local regulations. NABH Sanitarians/health agents are available in member communities to collaborate with other town boards, meet with the public and respond to citizens' public health related questions, concerns and complaints.



PET RABIES CLINIC

For Nashoba Region Residents

2026



The tag for 2026 will be an orange oval.

Dogs and cats over six (6) months of age, not previously immunized, and those with a green bell (2023) rabies tag must be immunized. Please bring a copy of your pet's last rabies certificate if you have it. Cats must be brought in cages or closed boxes during the last half of any clinic. The charge per immunization is Payable to the Veterinarian.

TOWN	VETERINARIAN	DATE & TIME	PLACE	COST
Ayer	Dr. Orzech	Fri. 3/20 5-6 PM	Ayer Animal Hospital 196 West Main St	\$25 CASH ONLY
	Dr. Clifford	Fri. 4/3 5-6 PM		
Berlin	Dr. Arad	Sat. 3/28 10-11 AM	Highway Barn 112 West St	\$25 CASH ONLY
Lancaster	Dr. Arad	Sat. 3/28 11:30 AM-12:30 PM	Lancaster Fire Station 1055 Main St	\$25 CASH ONLY
Littleton	Dr. Brooks	Sat. 3/21 2-4 PM	Littleton Animal Hospital 29 King St	\$25 CASH ONLY
Pepperell	Dr. Flanagan	Sat. 3/28 9-10:30 AM	Jersey St Fire Station	\$20 CASH OR CHECK
Stow	Dr. Manley	Sat. 3/21 9-11 AM	Highway Barn 88 S. Acton Rd	\$25 CASH ONLY
Townsend	Dr. Flanagan	Sat. 3/28 11-12:30 PM	Townsend Highway Dept. 177 Main St	\$20 CASH OR CHECK

Grant Opportunity- The Health Foundation of Central MA (THFCM) is accepting concept papers for their Activation Fund through March 1st. With grants typically ranging between \$50,000 and \$125,000, the Activation Fund supports discrete, one-year projects in Central Massachusetts aimed at helping organizations advance to their next level of capacity and effectiveness that can be sustained over time.

Learn More: thfcm.org/grantmaking/grant-opportunities/activation-fund/



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Agency Updates- Public Health Nursing Division:



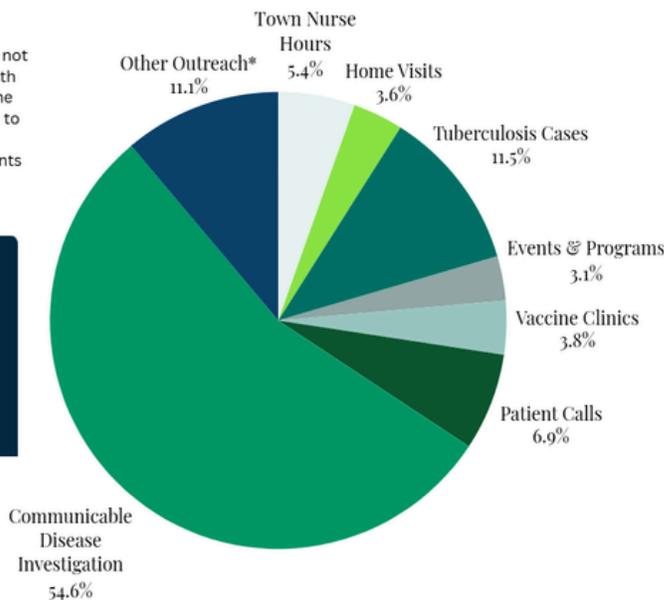
Our public health nurses have been hard at work keeping our communities healthy! In addition to the required, and often behind the scenes, disease reporting and surveillance work, the NABH nurses are available for clinics, consultations, home visits, and to offer or help coordinate educational programs. Please join us in welcoming Sandi Richard, LPN as our newest Public Health Nurse! We would also like to congratulate Susie Thompson, RN, on her new role as Public Health Nurse Manager! With our fully staffed Public Health Nursing team, Town Nurse Hours have resumed across the region as of January 2026. Please visit the last page of the newsletter for the monthly schedule!

Visit the Public Health Nursing page on our website <https://www.nashoba.org/public-health> to learn more about all of the services offered by the "Town Nurses."

What was the Public Health Nursing Team up to in 2025?
Check out the pie chart below for a breakdown! You can learn more in our [2025 Annual Report](#).

Public Health Nursing Services Conducted in 2025

*'Other outreach' includes activities that are not formally organized but help our public health nurses maintain a 'finger on the pulse' of the community. Examples include drop-in visits to community centers, shelters, housing authorities, and food pantries and touchpoints with community stakeholders.



Regional Highlights- 2025:

- 128 tuberculosis home visits (for 3 cases)
- 54 regular home visits
- 73 Town Nurse Hour events
- 3 hoarding cases

**Meet your new
Town Nurses!**



Welcome

The new NABH Public Health Nursing Team- Susie Thompson, RN (short!), Public Health Nurse Manager, and Sandi Richard, LPN (tall!), Community Health Nurse. Photo courtesy the Shirley COA

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Respiratory Illness Season Playbook

Seasonal respiratory illnesses include influenza (the flu), COVID-19, RSV, and the common cold. These illnesses are always around, but we tend to see more of them in the colder months. Help protect yourself and your family from respiratory illness this season by following healthy habits. Know your personal risk profile (and the risk profiles of those who rely on you to help them stay healthy) and make decisions accordingly. Talk to your doctor if you need support identifying your personal risk profile and specific steps to take.

For more information, visit www.mass.gov/info-details/protect-yourself-and-others-from-getting-sick



Stay home if you're sick



Consider wearing a mask if you have mild symptoms or are recovering



Cover coughs and sneezes



Get your updated flu and COVID-19 vaccines



Wash your hands regularly

10 REASONS TO GET VACCINATED!



Vaccine-preventable diseases have not gone away.	Young and healthy people can get very sick, too.
Vaccines will help keep you healthy.	Vaccine-preventable diseases are expensive.
Vaccines are as important to your overall health as diet and exercise.	Vaccines are safe.
Vaccination can mean the difference between life and death.	When you get sick, your children, grandchildren, and parents may also be at risk.
Vaccines cannot cause the diseases they are designed to prevent.	Your family, friends, and co-workers need you!



HOW TO TELL THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN FLU, RSV, COVID-19 AND THE COMMON COLD

Common symptoms may include cough, headaches, sneezing, runny nose, and congestion. Different symptoms may include:

✕ Rarely
✕ Sometimes
✕ Often

	COLD	FLU	COVID-19	RSV
ACHES	✕✕	✕✕✕	✕✕	✕
DIFFICULTY BREATHING	✕	✕	✕✕✕	✕✕
FATIGUE	✕✕	✕✕✕	✕✕✕	✕
FEVER	✕	✕✕✕	✕✕	✕✕
LOSS OF TASTE OR SMELL	✕	✕	✕✕	✕
SORE THROAT	✕✕✕	✕✕	✕✕✕	✕
WHEEZING	✕	✕	✕	✕✕✕

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Agency Updates- Grief Support Program:

Nashoba Associated Boards of Health welcomes adults who are experiencing grief to participate in monthly, drop-in Grief & Healing Support Groups throughout the region. Offered by NABH Grief Counselor Karen Campbell, MSMHC, these groups are an opportunity to learn more about the grief process and strategies for managing grief. These Grief & Healing Support Groups honor all types of grief, including grief due to loss, change and transitions. This program is generously funded by grants and donations and will continue for as long as funding remains available.



Grief & Healing Support Group Schedule*

**subject to change- please check website to confirm dates and times*

1st Tuesday:

- Ashburnham: 10:30 AM @ Stevens Memorial Library
- Bolton: 1 PM @ Bolton Public Library
- Boxborough: 3 PM @ Sargent Memorial Library

2nd Monday:

- Shirley: 12 PM @ Hazen Memorial Library
- Harvard: 2 PM @ Harvard Senior Center
- Lunenburg: 4 PM @ Lunenburg Library

3rd Tuesday:

- Townsend: 10 AM @ Townsend Senior Center
- Ashby: 12 PM @ Ashby Free Public Library
- Groton: 2 PM @ Groton Senior Center
- Ayer: 4 PM @ The Ayer Library

4th Monday:

- Pepperell: 10 AM, Albert Harris Ctr.
- Lancaster: 12:30 PM, Lancaster Community Ctr.

Please visit <https://www.nashoba.org/calendar> for the latest grief support schedule. Visit <https://www.nashoba.org/grief-support> to learn more.



MART Connects
In Ayer-Devens-Lancaster-Shirley
Public Transit Service
Rides up to 20 miles to and from your pickup location in Ayer, Devens, Lancaster, and Shirley.
Learn more: www.mrta.us/services/mart-connects/

Service hours: 5:30 AM – 10:00 PM, 7 days/wk

How to book: Call MART (978) 345-7711 Mon–Fri 8:30A-4:30P
Please book at least one day in advance by 2 PM.

Fare Chart (One-Way)

1-10 miles - \$4
11-15 miles - \$5
16-20 miles - \$7

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Community Partnership:



We continue to engage with our communities to both lead and support efforts to keep our residents healthy! Since our last newsletter, we have participated in a number of events throughout the region- read on for some highlights.

November: Grief Counselor Karen presented on “Managing Grief at the Holidays” in Townsend. Jenna attended the MA Public Health Alliance annual conference. Jenna and Susie visited Nashoba Springs Recovery Center for their Open House in Groton. We held our community health needs prioritization session as one of the final steps of our needs assessment.

December: Sandi Richard, LPN joined our team! Grief Counselor Karen presented “Grief is not Seasonal” in Townsend and Ashby. We officially launched our regional health equity micro-coalition, the Nashoba Health Equity Partnership (HEP). We visited our partners at Community Health Connections for a partnership meeting. We attended the Middlesex DA’s Opioid Task Force meeting. The Community Health Team met with a rep from one of our local PACE programs. We toured MOC’s Reproductive Services clinic in Fitchburg and discussed how our residents can access these services. We published our 2025 community health assessment.

January: Jenna taught Adult Mental Health First Aid classes in Dunstable and Stow. Kathryn held the first two Health Equity Partnership working group meetings (Healthcare Access and Aging, Social Isolation, & Digital Equity). Town Nurse Hours resumed across the health district! Karen presented “Living with Loss, Living with Meaning” at the Bolton COA. Jenna attended The Health Foundation of Central MA’s annual meeting.

February: Kathryn facilitated the Youth Mental Health and Holistic Community Planning Working Groups for the Nashoba HEP. We met with Harvard EMS and other partners to learn about their Community EMS model and discuss ways it could be expanded or replicated. We met with the Ayer Library to discuss their strategic plan. Jenna attended CHNA9’s quarterly meeting.

Ongoing: We continue to attend monthly Boxborough Wellbeing meetings, quarterly Groton TRIAD meetings, and host monthly meetings for our region’s COA & Outreach Workers and School Nurses. We are involved in transportation advocacy with the new North Central MA Regional Coordinating Council (RCC). We have launched a local health micro-coalition in partnership with the Health Equity Partnership of North Central MA and The Health Foundation to develop community-led solutions to upstream health policy and systems challenges.

For an up-to-date list of where we’ve been and will be in the region as well as archived newsletters, visit our News & Events page on the web at www.nashoba.org/news-events.



Ayer Library Children’s Room
Thursday, March 5th at 10:30 am



Photos: Highlighting our recent partnerships with the Ayer Library! Top - The Nashoba Health Equity Partnership Launch event in December, held at Ayer Library. Left to right, Amie Shei, President of The Health Foundation of Central MA, Chelsey Patris, Executive Director of The Health Equity Partnership of North Central MA (CHNA9), Kathryn Witherow, NABH Shared Services Coordinator & Coalition Organizer, and Jenna Montgomery, NABH Public Health Educator/Communications Specialist. Bottom- An ad put together by Ayer Library staff for our upcoming Teddy Bear Clinic.

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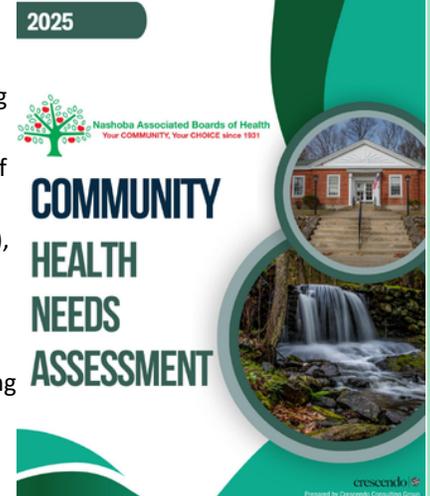
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NABH Community Health Needs Assessment

- A community health needs assessment (CHNA) is a systemic process involving the community to identify and analyze community health needs, used to assist in allocating resources where they are needed most.
- We completed and published the NABH CHNA in December 2025 with the assistance of Crescendo Consulting group.
- The process included secondary data collection, a community survey (1,349 responses), 12 in-person focus groups with 71 total participants, 31 stakeholder interviews, and a needs prioritization session with our Executive Committee and local leaders.
- Top needs identified in the assessment were: 1. youth mental health; 2. isolation and loneliness, especially among older adults; 3. aging population, long-term care, and aging in place; 4. chronic disease- high blood pressure, cholesterol, obesity; and 5. stress on ER and trauma services.

Check out the Community Health Needs Assessment: bit.ly/3MMUfHa



Nashoba Health Equity Partnership (HEP)

- A partnership between Nashoba Associated Boards of Health and the Health Equity Partnership of North Central MA (CHNA9), funded by The Health Foundation of Central MA (THFCM)
- A regional micro-coalition formed in response to/as an extension of the community-led work by the Nashoba Valley Health Planning Working Group. Formally launched in late 2025
- Informed by the NABH 2025 Community Health Needs Assessment
- Represents a 'spoke' of the Health Equity Partnership of North Central MA 'hub'. the Nashoba HEP is the first of several micro-coalitions in the North Central MA region designed to to implement community-identified strategies and build the capacity of local assets, as a complement to the ongoing regional CHNA9 coalition work
- 4 working groups: Youth Mental Health; Social Isolation, Aging, and Digital Equity; Healthcare Access; and Holistic Community Planning

Learn more about the Nashoba HEP: bit.ly/3Oea9et

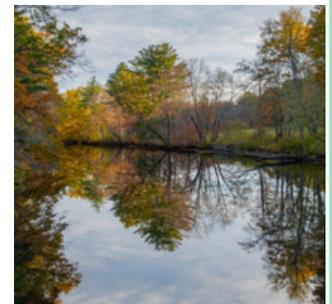
Have questions or interested in joining the coalition? Email Coalition Organizer

Kathryn Witherow at kwitherow@nashoba.org.



2025 Annual Report

We are pleased to present our 2025 annual report, which can be viewed at bit.ly/3MgGVLn. This report represents a snapshot of our regional work over the past year, and we are proud to share it with our community!



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Kids Corner- HEALTHY HEARTS



Your heart is like a super-powered pump that works 24/7—yes, even when you're asleep! ❤️ It pushes blood all around your body, delivering oxygen and nutrients like a speedy delivery truck.

Keeping your heart happy is easy: run, jump, dance, eat colorful fruits and veggies, and don't forget to laugh a lot! Even superheroes need strong hearts—and yours is already amazing. Take care of it, and it will keep you zooming, playing, and exploring every single day! 🚀

Heart Healthy Bingo from the **American Heart Association** is a fun way for families to practice healthy behaviors together.

Retrieved from:
www.heart.org/-/media/Healthy-Living-Files/Heart-Check-files/RD-Toolkits/Heart_Healthy_Bingo_Game.pdf?sc_lang=en

HEART HEALTHY BINGO



Choose 10 or more heart-healthy behaviors to practice as a family. When a behavior has been practiced, please mark off the square.



When you see the Heart-Check mark on a package of food, that means it is a heart-healthy food.

Eat a fruit or vegetable with your breakfast	Eat a healthy snack.		Drink water with a slice of fruit in it.	Look for a Heart-Check certified food in your pantry or fridge.
	Be physically active for 60 minutes or more.	Try a new fruit or vegetable.	Name 5 foods high in sodium.	Try a sparkling or carbonated water.
Read a nutrition facts label with an adult.	Spend a day without drinking a sugary drink.	Tell a family member 3 health benefits of being physically active.	Explain to a family member why tobacco is bad for your heart.	
Explain why it's important to avoid secondhand smoke.	Track your physical activity for a day.	Look for Heart-Check certified foods at your next trip to the market.		Eat three different colors of fruits and vegetables in one day.
Try a handful of unsalted nuts as a snack.		Tell a family member why sugary beverages are bad for your heart.	Try a breathing exercise to help with stress.	Count how many glasses of water you drink in one day.

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When is the Nurse in your Neighborhood?



Town Nurse Hours are held regularly throughout the Nashoba Assoc. Boards of Health (NABH) region. These drop-in style programs look different from town to town depending on resident needs! In some towns, clinic-style Town Nurse Hours allow for adult residents to have personalized, one-on-one attention from their towns' public health nurse. Offered services include blood pressure screenings, diet/nutrition information and teaching, medication review and assistance with identifying and coordinating community resources and referrals. Other towns offer a more informal program, where the nurse is available to discuss health topics with residents. Not to worry- you can still request some 1:1 time from the town nurse during a public health nurse chat event! Those residing in NABH towns can attend any of our scheduled Town Nurse Hours (TNH) in the region.



February is American Heart Month

Each year in February, we recognize American Heart Month, a time for us to consider our cardiovascular health and risk factors. Cardiovascular disease is the leading cause of death worldwide, and our lifestyle can play a key role in our risk of developing cardiovascular disease. Appropriately, the Town Nurse Hours 'theme' for February is Heart Health!



Learn more about keeping your heart healthy at our town nurse hours or by visiting: www.heart.org/en/healthy-living

FEBRUARY 2026 TOWN NURSE HOURS

Please visit our website for the most up-to-date TNH schedule: www.nashoba.org/calendar

TOWN	DAY OF MONTH	TIME	LOCATION	ADDRESS
ASHBURNHAM	3 RD TUES	10 AM-11 AM	TOWN HALL	32 MAIN ST.
ASHBY	2 ND MON	10-11 AM	TOWN HALL, LAND USE ROOM	895 MAIN ST.
AYER	2 ND THURS	11 AM-12 PM	SENIOR CENTER	18 POND ST.
BERLIN	2 ND TUES	12 PM-1 PM	BERLIN COA	23 LINDEN ST.
BOLTON	3 RD TUES	1 PM-2 PM	BOLTON COA	600 MAIN ST.
BOXBOROUGH	2 ND WED	11:15 AM-12:15 PM	COMMUNITY CENTER	30 MIDDLE RD.
DUNSTABLE	4 TH WED	11 AM-12 PM	LIBRARY	588 MAIN ST.
GROTON	4 TH WED	1 PM-2 PM	THE GROTON CENTER	163 WEST MAIN ST.
HARVARD	3 RD THURS	11:30 AM-12:30 PM	SENIOR CENTER	16 LANCASTER CTY RD.
LANCASTER	1 ST TUES	11 AM-12 PM	COMMUNITY CENTER	39 HARVARD RD.
LUNENBURG	4 TH THURS	9-10 AM	LUNENBURG ADULT ACTIVITY CTR	25 MEMORIAL DR.
PEPPERELL	3 RD WED	10 AM-12 PM	ALBERT HARRIS CTR	37 NASHUA RD.
SHIRLEY	2 ND THURS	9:30-10:30 AM	SHIRLEY COA	9 PARKER RD.
STOW	1 ST WED	10 AM- 12 PM	POMPO COMMUNITY CTR	509 GREAT RD.
TOWNSEND	3 RD WED	12:30-2 PM	SENIOR CENTER	16 DUDLEY RD.

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