

APHA President's Report
APHA Governing Council Session I
October 26, 2024

It is hard to believe that we have come full circle and find ourselves celebrating another year in the world of public health, on the American Public Health Association stage... And as I reflect on the past year and a half, I continue to be in awe of and so very humbled to have been elected and given the opportunity to serve in the role of President of the American Public Health Association (APHA). It is important that I acknowledge the fact that I serve in this role, as the first grassroots, non-academic, non-degreed, African American woman to be elected to this office in the 150+ year history of the Association.

As I prepared for the three-year term (that officially started in 2023), serving as President-elect, President, and Immediate Past President, it was very important to understand the role and responsibilities attached to each year. And for me, it was equally important to know what the role "did not" include, given that I was hearing many comments from the general public that were not factual... but that provided teachable moments. It was important to recognize first and foremost that I had been elected President of APHA, the National voice of public health, with the responsibility of serving as the Association's elected chief officer and one of APHA's spokespersons.

During my term serving as President-elect, I was introduced to several of the APHA boards and committees and a diverse set of leadership opportunities, including the leadership appointment efforts for Association-wide committees, Action Board Chair appointment, and selection of its members from among names submitted by the Sections. While still serving as President-elect and throughout 2024, my Presidential year, I had the opportunity to visit (in-person or via zoom) over twenty of our State Affiliates and other public health associations, academic institutions, community/academic collaboratives, and grassroots/community groups across the country. Each engagement provided an opportunity for bidirectional learning, sharing and growth. While each visit was similar in many ways, I found each to be uniquely rich but different, working on issues specific to their membership and the communities that they serve. I especially appreciated the interest and special requests for deeper conversations about my personal public health journey and my lived experience.

Moving the Needle Forward:

Earlier in this process I talked about the significance of the "Sankofa Bird"... and

how it is infused into my journey... the idea of being able to look back into our past to collect and bring forward those things that will move us to the future...

- In 2022, and prior to being elected, I was asked what I thought the most pressing challenge that public health faces... and my answer was that I believe it is the lack of a clear understanding of what public health is, and that it still rises high on the list for many people. I have begun to use APHA's definition in hopes of moving folk to a better understanding... and that is, "the practice of promoting health and preventing disease in populations" and adding the thought that public health includes any and everything about where we live, work, and play.
- During my visits and presentations, I also shared three specific areas of focus that I would address as President: 1). Strengthening the public health workforce – by exposing elementary, middle, and high school to the field of public health; 2). Increasing the collaborations between like-minded APHA Units (i.e., the Affiliates, Sections, and Caucuses); and 3, Unmasking and addressing the institutional, structural, and systemic racism that impact the health and health outcomes in our communities.
- But to further move the needle on these and many other conversations that we are having or need to have in all of our communities, I have offered another possible solution in each of my visits... I have ended my presentations with an invitation for the participants to join me in creating empowerment zones ("e-zones") ... which are spaces where you are able to share and receive information, spaces where you not only show respect but where you are respected, and spaces where you recognize, accept, and feel confident enough employing individual and collective power. I propose that when these conditions exist, you should not only leave that space inspired and invigorated, but you should also leave personally and collectively energized, engaged, and empowered... having created and/or experienced "an e-zone."