

PHI's mission is supported by its Membership.

Welcoming New Members: PHI is taking in the Michigan Polio Network

Post-Polio Health International is pleased to announce that beginning December 1, 2018, the Michigan Polio Network (MPN) and its members will become a part of the PHI family. Since its inception in 1984, MPN has been proudly serving Michigan's polio survivors. We look forward to providing their members with the same level of quality information and services that they've received from MPN over the past three-and-a-half decades. (MPN has published a series of articles reflecting on their history in their recent newsletters, which can be read at www.michiganpolionetwork.com/polio-perspectives.)



MPN Chairman Bruce Sachs (l) and Tim Brown, Vice Chairman and Treasurer

MPN's board of directors, acknowledging that the MPN mission had been successfully accomplished, sought a method to cease operations while ensuring that the Network's members continued to receive the latest post-polio information and support. In search of that solution, Tim Brown, MPN Vice Chairman and Treasurer, entered into a series of discussions with then PHI Executive Director Joan Headley. These discussions ultimately led to a transition agreement between MPN and PHI which was approved by the boards of both organizations.

MPN members were notified of the plan in a letter sent out by the MPN leadership last September. MPN Chairman Bruce Sachs stated in the letter that the decision was made with their members' well-being foremost in mind and only after "very thoughtful discussions and reflection into the history and mission of the MPN." Sachs explained that the decision was partly driven by a reduction in the demand among the organization's members for their services.

One exception to this was MPN's quarterly newsletter, *Polio Perspectives*, which has provided members with informative, timely articles about the late effects of polio and other polio-related topics. PHI will help fill that gap by providing MPN's former members with PHI's quarterly newsletter and electronic *Membership Memo*.

Full PHI benefits extended to all MPN members

Under the terms of the agreement, all active members of the Michigan Polio Network as of December 1, 2018 will automatically have their memberships transferred to PHI. MPN members will enjoy the full benefits of PHI membership for however long their MPN membership was set to last. While the Michigan Polio Network will cease doing business as an organization, local support groups affiliated with the organization will continue to meet.

As part of the process, and to satisfy legal and statutory requirements, MPN will donate all of its assets to PHI shortly before its formal dissolution. MPN's leadership has been working closely with PHI over the past two years to make sure this is done in an orderly process and that it has the full support of its membership.

Shifting needs create new challenges

In many ways, the dilemma faced by MPN is a common one for many state and local support groups across the country. While there are an estimated 350,000–500,000 polio survivors in the United States, only a small fraction of those are members of post-polio support groups, and those numbers have been on the decline in recent years.

Several post-polio support groups have found themselves unable to continue their mission in recent years. Texas Polio Survivors Association, Iowa Polio Survivors, Greater Boston Post-Polio Association and several others have dissolved over the past few years.

The challenges faced by support groups are many:

- ♦ declining participation
- ♦ difficulty traveling to meeting locations
- ♦ easy access to information online
- ♦ the creation of support groups on social media networks such as Facebook.

And then there is the issue of “burnout.” There are many groups where the burden of leadership has been placed on one or a few individuals to lead and run the group over many years. It can be difficult for some to find the time and energy to continually publish newsletters, arrange support group meetings, and answer members' phone calls and emails. Some may become physically and emotionally exhausted if others don't step up to share leadership responsibilities.

MPN as a useful model to consider

While not all the reasons cited above apply to MPN's situation, their decision may still provide a useful model for other groups to follow who find they no longer have the interest or ability to continue.

In their agreement with PHI, the Michigan Polio Network has made sure that their members will continue to have access to timely, medically accurate information. Their members will also be able to get individual help by calling PHI's office with questions or by submitting them via email.

For those who value face-to-face interaction, local support groups that were affiliated with MPN can continue to hold meetings if enough people maintain an interest in doing so. MPN will continue to maintain their website to publicize upcoming support group meetings or disseminate other necessary information for those groups.

Throughout the process, PHI and MPN have tried to remain sensitive to the needs of Michigan's polio survivors. We look forward to successfully completing the transition and welcoming new members into the PHI fold. ■