Upper Merrimack Valley Medical Reserve Corps

www.umvmrc.org

STANDING STRONG FOR HEALTH!

JULY 2026

A Message from Your Staff

As this newsletter goes to press, health leaders from across our region are reflecting on lessons learned from our final functional exercise of FY2026. Staff from public health, long-term care facilities, hospitals, emergency management, and other disciplines met on June 10 for a "stovepipe-free" disaster planning workshop. Participants explored a challenging scenario: what if a major hurricane made landfall?

Faced with 120 mph winds, power outages, flooding, impassable roads, and large-scale evacuations, how would our organizations work together to protect the affected communities? Complex issues arose: How can we shelter our most vulnerable residents? How do we handle pets amidst these upheavals? How can we communicate effectively with those who don't speak English? And what role does the Medical Reserve Corps (MRC) play?

Our nation should take pride in these often-unseen collaborations across multiple agencies. Partnerships are a vital component of resilience and preparedness efforts. The MRC offers a vital connection that bridges many of these regional, state, and national initiatives.

The UMV MRC reports on our own progress through member communications, newsletters, and articles published on the national ASPR / MRC website. For example, here's the link to a story highlighting our ongoing support of local veterans through free blood pressure screenings and medication consultations, offered during their regional breakfast gatherings on the last Thursday of each month at the Chelmsford Senior Center: https://bit.ly/umvmrc-aspr.

We hope this newsletter gives you a clear picture of local, state, regional and national efforts to train responders, strengthening our collective ability to keep communities safe, healthy, and prepared. Please share it widely! We thank our amazing MRC volunteers, wishing each of you a delightful summer.

Warmest Regards,

Rae Dick, CP-FS—Director *Nancy Burns, EMT*—Coordinator

Members of our unit made a strong showing at the statewide MRC Training Day on March 3 at Assumption University in Worcester.

The Mission of the UMV MRC

The mission of the Upper Merrimack Valley Medical Reserve Corps is to recruit, train, and deploy members for disaster preparedness in three areas:

- Public health emergencies
- Mass casualty events
- Community service activities

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MA MRC Web Site:
www.mamedicalreservecorps.org

National MRC Web Site:
https://aspr.hhs.gov/mrc

Communities Served: Billerica, Chelmsford, Dracut, Lowell, Tewksbury, Tyngsboro, and Westford (host agency).

STILL HEARING FROM US?

It's crucial for our unit, its members and affiliates to maintain two-way communications. Unless there's a call-out, we generally send our volunteers about two emails per month. If you haven't heard from us in a while, please contact Rae or Nancy to see whether our messages are still reaching your in-boxes.

NOTE FROM THE NATIONAL OFFICE

Dear Upper Merrimack Valley MRC Volunteers,

As Acting Director for the Office of the Medical Reserve Corps, I have the privilege of seeing the impact that you make on the lives of the people who call the Upper Merrimack Valley home. The care you provide to residents, the dedication you show through your many hours of service, and the support you contribute to your communities is inspiring.

For example, when a fire destroyed a series of apartments in Lawrence last August, three UMV MRC volunteers and its Coordinator stepped up and leaned in. They served as "ambassadors" at a Recovery Resource Center to help 34 families get the housing and basic necessities they needed to survive. In one of their darkest moments, the UMV MRC showed up for families in their community.

In October, UMV MRC volunteers staffed flu clinics in five communities across the region and served over 1,000 residents. You committed 400 hours and provided over $17,000 in medical services. That's a very significant impact! You made a real difference in the health and wellbeing of these communities.

And that's just a small taste of how UMV MRC volunteers have helped residents in the region throughout the year. Members volunteered at clinics, conducted free hypertension screenings at Veterans breakfasts, conducted outreach at community events, and offered trainings on disability awareness, pet preparedness, and so much more!

Finally, on a sad note, we're saying goodbye to Jennifer Frenette, who's served as the Regional Liaison for Region 1 for over two decades. She made herself available to support every one of the activities above, along with countless others over the last 22+ years. As Regional Liaison, she's played a vital role as the eyes and ears on the ground for unit leaders and state coordinators. We'll miss you, Jennifer!

And let's extend a warm welcome to Natay Minor! Natay joins us from Region 5 where she served as Regional Liaison. She has impressive experience in security, intelligence, diplomacy, chaplaincy, and public coordination, having served previously as a Diplomatic Advisor in the Department of State and as a Security Forces Supervisor in the Air Force.

Thank you, Jennifer and Natay, and thank you all for the vital services you provide to your community when they need them the most!

Samantha Spindel

Samantha Spindel, Ph.D.
CAPT, U.S. Public Health Service
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Center for Preparedness,
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and Human Services

Jennifer Frenette receiving a plaque from her regional ASPR colleagues at her retirement event.

REGIONAL ROUND-UP

As Captain Spindel said so poignantly in the National Note on Page 2, we will miss Jennifer Frenette after her service for over 22 years as the Regional Liaison between our federal counterparts and New England's MRC units. We appreciated every day of Jennifer's wisdom and skillful leadership, along with her steady manner and relentless enthusiasm for the National MRC Program. Thanks in part to Jennifer's expertise, our region of six states contributed more than its share of success towards the national level.

The strength of our MRC program is revealed in part by sheer numbers. Throughout calendar 2025, the economic value of service provided by MRC members was $11,588.397.57 – over eleven million dollars! These statistics were generated by the collective efforts of MRCs at local and regional levels.

Since our last newsletter, the numbers for New England in FY2026 (July 1, 2025 to June 30, 2026) are impressive. Data from the national MRC website says that all 6 states reported data, for 75 individual units, participating in 2837 activities, activating 20,881 volunteers donating 63,676.9 hours of service. The economic value added up to $2,523.224.59; over two and a half million dollars!

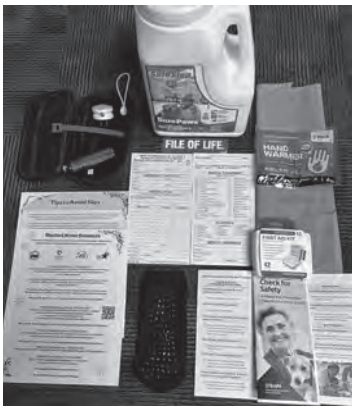
Our New England Region I remains in good hands with the transition of leadership to Natay Minor. In addition to serving as the Region 5 Regional Liaison, Natay was appointed recently as the liaison for Regions 1 and 2. In these capacities, Natay supports MRC units across Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, Wisconsin, and New England. She provides coordination, technical assistance, and strategic guidance to strengthen volunteer readiness and enhance public health and emergency response capabilities.

"I'm honored to serve as the new Regional Liaison for New England with the Medical Reserve Corps; a region known for its strong sense of community, resilience, and leadership in public health and emergency preparedness," says Natay. "I look forward to partnering with MRC units across the Northeast to strengthen regional collaboration and support the unique needs of New England communities."

Natay also serves as a Project Officer for the MRC–Territory and Tribal Nations, Representative Organizations for Next Generation (MRC-STTRONG) grant, a national initiative focused on strengthening and sustaining MRC units through enhanced training, recruitment, and operational capacity building nationwide.

In addition to her federal service, Natay is a proud member of the United States Air Force, with 10 years of honorable service. Her military background, combined with her work across ASPR and the MRC network, reflects her strong commitment to national preparedness and her dedication to supporting communities during emergencies and times of need.

HOST AGENT DELIVERS!



As the host agent for our unit, the Westford Health Department was the catalyst for our third winter in which we created "fall prevention kits." This activity is one of many examples showing how MRC units extend caring services across their communities. Fourteen MRC volunteers and staff members held a packing party to gather this year's collection of useful items and delivered them to vulnerable residents. Recipients were grateful for the pet-friendly ice melt to protect against slick winter surfaces, as well as items to avoid falls in the home.

STATEWIDE MRC UPDATES

Recent Activities

The Massachusetts Department of Public Health Office of Preparedness and Emergency Management continues to advance several statewide initiatives through the MRC-STTRONG Grant, supported by the Administration for Strategic Preparedness and Response. This year has already brought a range of impactful activities and opportunities for Medical Reserve Corps (MRC) volunteers and leaders across the Commonwealth. Here's a quick recap of some of the initiatives:

Statewide Training Day

In March, DPH hosted its 4th Annual Volunteer Training Day, bringing together nearly 150 volunteers from across Massachusetts. Participants engaged in a mix of hands-on and educational sessions designed to strengthen skills essential to MRC service.

Virtual Psychological First Aid Trainings

From March through June, Riverside Community Care, Inc. has been offering a series of virtual Psychological First Aid courses. These full-day trainings equip volunteers with foundational behavioral health response skills to support communities following disasters and critical incidents.

Unit Leader Technical Assistance Sessions

This spring, four technical assistance sessions were held for MRC unit leaders. Each session focused on a targeted topic area, with an emphasis on practical strategies to enhance unit operations, strengthen capacity, and encourage peer-to-peer learning.

"Show Me" Tool E-Learning Course

A new e-learning course is currently in development to highlight best practices for using the DPH "Show Me" communication tool, which uses pictograms to help individuals express basic needs. Once complete, the course will be available to all volunteers through the TRAIN Learning Network.

Statewide Meeting Exercise for MRC Leadership

In June, MRC leaders will convene for a statewide meeting, including a tabletop exercise designed to test unit deployment plans and processes. This exercise will help identify gaps and opportunities to strengthen preparedness efforts.

Monthly Unit Leader Forums

MRC Coordinators continue to meet monthly, sharing updates, best practices, and addressing challenges. These forums provide valuable space for ongoing collaboration and connection across units.

Winter Deployments

MRC volunteers were actively engaged this winter, supporting shelter operations during a major snowstorm that impacted southeastern Massachusetts. Volunteers from across the state assisted in caring for some of the region's most vulnerable residents.

MA Responds System Updates

The MA Responds volunteer database underwent a system migration at the end of the year. While the backend functionality remains the same, the platform now features a refreshed website. MRC leaders can also now utilize phone and text communication features—be sure to opt in to receive updates via text if preferred.

DPH OPEM remains grateful to the ongoing efforts of all MRC leaders and volunteers and looks forward to another jam-packed year!

STTRONG GRANT COMPLETION AT TILI

In May 2023, 33 awardees in states and jurisdictions across the country were awarded a total of $50 million to fund up to 70 projects under the MRC State, Territory and Tribal Nations, Representative Organizations for Next Generation (MRC-STTRONG) program. The Rhode Island MRC leveraged some of their STTRONG funding to develop exceptional training for MRC units from across New England.

May 2024 saw the launch of TILI: the Training, Innovation, and Leadership Institute in West Warwick, RI. This state-of-the-art facility offers transformative experiences in professional development and crisis response. The timing provided to be a match made in heaven: programs that were funded by STTRONG were developed to harness the power of TILI in delivering full weekend training programs over the next two years.

The kickoff of these TILI seminars was on February 14, 2025. All levels of volunteers – including 4 from our unit – participated in the debut class on Leadership. Additional seminars, on topics such as Clinical Skills, continued through August.

Training resumed in January 2026 with 12 new weekend options. Clinical sessions covered Geriatrics, Pre-Hospital Life Support, and Emergency Pediatric Care. Non-clinical classes included Principles of Ethics, All-Hazards Response, and MRC Leadership and Resiliency. The final weekend (Pediatrics) took place on May 23 and 24.

Four members of the UMV MRC attended this year's kickoff session about Geriatric Care.

Rob Holland discussed the physiology of infant respirations.

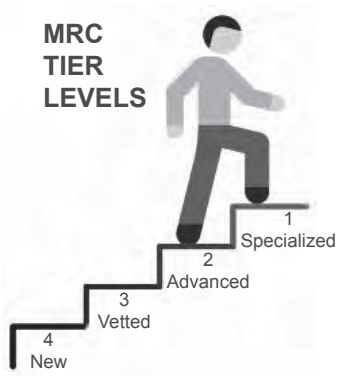
Students learned about starting intraosseous infusion for pediatric medications.

Instructor Rob Holland said that the overall training focus was on empowering units to provide excellent care on MRC missions. "These programs covered everything from sheltering issues – which could require skills in basic wound care and recognition of chronic conditions – to vaccination clinics and anaphylaxis." Courses also provided response techniques for homeless sheltering across stretches of extreme weather, and things to know in storm evacuations.

TILI leadership expects to offer these and other classes in the future, knowing that this education builds resiliency in multiple categories. Responders who have encountered stressful or traumatic experiences can take comfort in knowing that they provided care as they were trained to do. Holland concluded, "What a valuable return on investments, and a great use of resources for MRC members across New England!"

TIER-LEVEL TRAINING

Ever since our unit became active in 2004, we've prided ourselves on offering unique and practical education to our volunteers. Sometimes we refer members to groups such as TILI for specialty classes. More often, we host the training ourselves. Our standard curriculum includes New Member Orientations and American Heart Association classes: BLS (Basic Life Support) CPR for medical members, and HeartSaver First Aid and CPR for the layperson. In FY2027, we'll be linking our training to Tier Levels that are recognized across MA and national MRCs for volunteers: Tier 4 = New, Tier 3 = Vetted, Tier 2 = Advanced, and Tier 1 = Specialized.



What a Difference a Year Makes!

We collaborated with the senior center in Westford to support 'Bone Health Day.'

We kicked off our training by hosting a seminar on "Animals in Disaster."

By September 30, we trained seven members as AHA instructors to deliver Basic Life Support (for healthcare providers), Heartsaver CPR/AED and First Aid.

Fourteen members attended the Patrick Gill Trauma Symposium, with speakers including the pioneering surgeon Dr. Susan Briggs.

We supported a Family Resource Center when an apartment fire in Lawrence displaced 70 residents.

Medical members provided free monthly BP screenings for the region's veterans.

Members supported vaccination clinics in the five of our seven UMV communities that rely on MRC volunteers.

In October 2025 and April 2026, our medical members showed up in force to support the biannual LASA clinics for the medically underserved across Greater Lowell.

We hosted the first annual RDHRS seminar for New England's Disaster Medical Teams, where 50 attendees practiced hands-on skills.

Upper Merrimack Valley Medical Reserve Corps

medical reserve corps

NEW CURRICULUM: LIFE-SAVING ESSENTIALS!

When our unit was invited to develop a course for both new and non-medical MRC members – as well as our CERT (Community Emergency Response Teams) affiliates – we jumped at the chance! Our counterparts from the Central Middlesex region were seeking a program on Life-Saving Essentials to practice hands-on skills that are especially relevant for local inter-agency deployments.

Students learned how to insert emergency medical information for themselves and loved ones in their iPhones, to have handy in case of disasters and the need for urgent care.

We already had backgrounds in the material requested, plus other subjects that felt appropriate. Topics in the new curriculum included Good Samaritan protections, scene safety and self-care, donning and doffing gloves and other PPE, infectious diseases and blood-borne pathogens, recognizing placards for hazardous materials in transit, hands-only CPR, bleeding control techniques, choking relief, and the use of Narcan for a suspected opioid overdose.

Students were able to master hands-only CPR, even with no prior training!

Donning and doffing gloves is an essential skill for infection control.

Small-group sessions practiced wound packing and other techniques.

Full PPE can include the use of masks, goggles and gowns.

A week after the class took place, the MRC leader who had requested our help sent this encouraging message: "One of my MRC Advisory Committee members, who is also a CERT Director for one of my communities, received such positive feedback from members of his group who attended, that he wrote me to express his thoughts about using this as a foundational training for new volunteers as well as a refresher for veterans." We are honored to make this new curriculum available to other MRC and CERT units across Massachusetts!

BEHIND THE SCENES

Preparedness efforts include a plethora of activities that extend far beyond actual disaster responses. You might think of your Director and Coordinator as the 'umbrella' that shields our volunteers from the day-to-day incidentals that make effective responses possible.

The need for close collaboration across entities in a disaster is vital, yet not surprising. Participants who had been involved in previous responses explained how multi-agency roles intersected frequently.

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For example, the photo at the right shows the UMV MRC Director (who also serves as the Westford Health Director) sharing her insights at a Table-Top Exercise (TTX) at the Westford Fire Department. That event gathered 15 municipal leaders to examine their interactions in case of a severe-weather emergency. There were representatives on hand from Westford Public Schools, Town Management, Public Works, Finance, Information Technology, Facilities, the Council on Aging, Animal Control, Police and Fire (co-Emergency Managers), Public Health, and the MRC.

The scenario of a pending ice storm allowed two days of monitoring the forecast while making crucial preparations. Town residents would be advised to plan for power outages and other impacts. Emergency services would check staffing levels, equipment needs, and mutual aid status. Animal Control would notify pet owners of precautions and verify placements if animals had to be evacuated. All departments would play some role in protecting residents and managing preparations. Many contributors would be needed to assess whether shelters would be required for those whose homes were unsafe due to flooding and power outages. The process of opening, running, and closing a shelter is fraught with challenges. As disasters wind down, follow-ups can range behavioral health concerns to restoring normal operations.

The MRC staff and partners joined numerous multi-agency exercises and seminars on disaster response throughout the year. Each event builds our regional collaborative deployment skills.

Whether the emergency affects one town or an entire region, such precautions can pay off immensely in saving lives and minimizing long-term effects. The saying still applies: All disasters are LOCAL!

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

The UMV MRC is proactive in raising awareness of healthy lifestyles and the need for preparedness. We connect with others through health fairs, Public Health Museum events, collaborations with schools, and regional festivals. We'll do whatever it takes to help make our communities safe!

VOLUNTEER MONTH SPECIAL EVENTS!

Volunteers are the lifeblood of our unit and the reason we are able to provide excellent service to our communities. To celebrate April as National Volunteer Month, our focus was to appreciate our busy members for all that they do. In April alone they staffed the second of two high school health fairs, the biannual LASA clinic, and monthly screening of Veterans for hypertension. We were pleased to say thanks by inviting our volunteers to a pizza party. This informal event allowed us to reconnect and celebrate our successes, review the season's activities, and discuss plans for the coming year.

We concluded Volunteer Month with a special presentation by Susan Wolf-Fordham, DJ, MPA on 'Disability Competence and Interactions in Vaccine Clinics and Emergency Shelters.'

Attendees valued the seminar on caring for those with Access and Functional Needs, learning practical applications for deployments.

This interactive training was based on actual scenarios and was specifically tailored for our potential interactions with those who have disabilities. In addition to UMV MRC members, attendees represented the Red Cross, CERT, and advocacy organizations.

Interactive discussions encouraged members to see themselves applying concepts of OARS (Observe, Assess Respond, Verify Success) and the CMIST framework.

The speaker shared insights about the definition and prevalence of disabilities, encouraging questions about how best to identify a range of needs and to serve vulnerable populations with compassion.

The enthusiasm from attendees was uplifting. Medical members gladly accepted the continuing education credits along with the camaraderie. The Red Cross participant shared, "Thank you again for welcoming me into your meeting last night. I really appreciated the opportunity to join. Susan was a fantastic instructor, and the session was full of valuable information. I also really enjoyed the discussions within my group. You have an incredible team there. If we were ever to open a shelter, I would absolutely want them on my team."

The speaker herself had enjoyed working with our members and affiliates. "What I especially liked what that it was a FUN group," she recalled. "They were very participatory, as well as knowledgeable. Most important: they were such a ***thoughtful*** class! They shared insights that were spot-on, with good humor. They were just a lovely group to work with."

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Please contact the Coordinator at 978-399-2549 or NBurns@WestfordMA.gov to sign up for activities of interest. Also check email notices and the web site, www.UMVMRC.org, for updates.

I. Festivals and Service Opportunities – Volunteers at all levels are needed to cover shifts at these events. *Medical members*: especially for hypertension screening and first aid. *Non-medical members*: for preparedness and health initiatives. *All*: raise awareness of the MRC and offer community outreach.

Sat. Sept. 12: ***Dracut Old Home Day***. Three shifts: 8 to 9 a.m. for set-up; 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. and 1 to 5 p.m. for staffing. High School Complex, 1580 Lakeview Ave, Dracut.

Sat. Sept. 26: ***Chelmsford Fall Festival.*** 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. at Town Common. Seeking 3 volunteers for each 3-hour shift to support the Health Dept. exhibit and family activities: petting zoo and pumpkin decorating table. (No bouncy house volunteers are needed.)

Sat. Oct. 17: ***LASA Health Clinic.*** 7 a.m. to 2 p.m. Medical volunteers are needed for intake and basic services, for area residents who have inadequate access to health care.

Sun. Oct. 18: ***Bay State Marathon.*** 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. Medical volunteers are asked to staff the triage tents at key locations in Lowell.

Thursdays Through 2026: ***Veteran's BP Screening.*** Chelmsford Senior Center, 75 Groton Road (Rt. 40), 8 to 10 a.m. last Thursday of the month at Veteran's breakfasts. Need two medical volunteers on each date; can sign up for one or several: July 30, August 27, Sept. 24, Oct. 29, Nov. 19, Dec. 17.

II. Flu Clinics – One of our signature activities is the support of inoculation clinics, primarily for influenza. These scheduled events help members get to know our community partners and each other, while practicing essential skills in an easygoing environment. Volunteers of all backgrounds are urged to participate. "Inoculators" are typically nurses who fill syringes and vaccinate. "Admins" are anyone willing to provide non-medical support, even medical members. Each town determines its clinic schedules throughout the fall, so more clinics will be added over time. Watch your emails for the schedule. The dates that have been requested so far are as follows.

Chelmsford:

Senior Housing Flu Clinics (multiple sites): Weds. Sept. 30, 9 am to 2 pm – Seeking 3 admins and 4 inoculators.

Senior Center Flu Clinic: Thurs. Oct. 1, 3 to 7 pm – Seeking 5 admins and 7 nurses.

Public School Flu Clinics (multiple sites) – Separate dates **TBD**. High school and Middle school: Seeking 4 admins and 4 inoculators. Elementary school staff: Seeking 2 admins and 2 inoculators.

Town Hall Flu Clinic (two shifts): Tues. Oct. 6, 11:00 am to 6:00 pm. Mid-morning: Seeking 3 admins and 3 inoculators. Afternoon: Seeking 3 admins and 4 inoculators.

Westford:

Seniors flu clinic, Millennium School: Thurs. Sept. 17, set-up at 10 a.m. for clinic from noon to 4 p.m. Seeking 12 admins and 12 nurses.

Municipal employees flu clinic, Millennium School: Tues. Oct. 20; set-up at 1 p.m. for clinic from 2-5. Seeking 5 admins and 5 nurses.

Westford residents (ages 3+) flu clinincs, Westford Academy: Thursdays, Oct. 15 and 22; set-up at 2:15 p.m. for clinics from 4-8. Seeking 5 admins and 7 nurses.

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Civilian Volunteers Building Strong, Healthy, and Prepared Communities

CLASSES TO BOOST CAPACITY

The UMV MRC exists to make our communities safer and healthier. We recruit, onboard, train, drill, retain, and deploy volunteers throughout the year to maximize our capacity to serve – especially during times of great need.

Members know that we're always eager to match their skills with gratifying opportunities.

Please mark your calendars for our first three scheduled training sessions for FY2027, while watching your emails for a range of events throughout the year. Classes are generally free but attendees must preregister. The following sessions will be held at Millennium School / Central Office, 23 Depot St. in Westford.

Thurs. Aug. 20: Sarah Pedone, MSN, RN – *Triage and Trauma: Lessons from Clinical Care*. Applying for nursing CEUs and OEMS hours for EMTs. Two-hour daytime class; exact times TBD.

Weds. Sept. 2: *BLS* (Basic Life Support): CPR/AED for medical members. 5:30 to 8:30 p.m. Valid for two years of certification from the American Heart Association.

Thurs. Oct. 1: *Life-Saving Essentials*. Basic skills for both new and non-medical volunteers. 5 to 8 p.m.

Among our many training topics are ICS (Incident Command System), PFA (Psychological First Aid), and Sheltering Skills. Our host agent, the Westford Health Department, also provides six-hour in-depth training up to four times a year. Call the main number at 978-692-5509 or check https://www.westfordma.gov for details on Youth and Adult MHFA (Mental Health First Aid).