Maine's 2018 Health Care Hero Award Winners!

2018 Distinguished Health Care Hero Awards
Jack Comart, Esq., Trish Riley, and Gordon Smith, Esq.

This award recognizes the extraordinary contributions and ongoing advocacy efforts of an individual whose dedication and commitment has helped make significant gains in moving forward policy initiatives aimed at preserving, improving, or expanding access to affordable health care for all Mainers.

Few people have the fortitude to keep working to improve Maine's health care system like these leaders. From board service to all they've done both behind the scenes, in public service, and throughout their careers, we are honored to have worked along-side these truly distinguished health care heroes.

2018 Individual Health Care Hero Awards
Liz Harmon and Martha Morrison

This award recognizes the efforts and contributions of an individual consumer advocate to preserve, improve, or expand access to affordable health care on behalf of Mainers who would be directly impacted or benefit from health care coverage gains. We are pleased to honor Liz Harmon and Martha Morrison with the Individual Health Care Hero Awards.

2018 Organizational Health Care Hero Awards
Mainers for Health Care Leadership Team and Maine Providers Standing Up for Health Care

This award recognizes the efforts of an organization, institution, or other entity that has engaged its members or other stakeholders in advocating for systemic policy initiatives aimed at preserving, improving, or expanding access to affordable health care in Maine. The Mainers for Health Care Leadership Team and Maine Providers Standing Up for Health Care have been leaders in Maine at the state house, and at the community level to improve access to affordable health care. We are honored to have them as our Organizational Health Care Hero Award Recipients.
Jack Comart, Esq., Litigation Director, Maine Equal Justice Partners
Jack Comart is the Litigation Director at Maine Equal Justice Partners. Jack is an attorney who has represented low-income people for nearly 40 years in the courts, before administrative agencies and in the Maine Legislature. He began his legal services career in Maine with Pine Tree Legal Assistance and came to MEJP in 2004. Jack's expertise is in MaineCare and other areas of public benefits law. He has lead and won a number of successful legal battles on behalf of Maine people resulting in the preservation of public benefits, improved access to health care and other services. Jack attended Brandeis University and received his law degree from Northeastern University, School of Law.

Trish Riley, Executive Director, National Academy for State Health Policy
Trish Riley is Executive Director of the National Academy for State Health Policy and president of its corporate Board. She helped build NASHP as CEO from 1988-2003. Previously, she was a Distinguished Fellow in State Health Policy at George Washington University and taught in the graduate program at the Muskie School of Public Service, University of Southern Maine.

From 2003-2011 she served as Director of the Governor's Office of Health Policy and Finance, leading the effort to develop a comprehensive, coordinated health system in Maine including access to affordable health insurance. Trish was the principal architect of Dirigo Health Reform and served as the state's liaison to the federal government and Congress, particularly during deliberations around national health reform. She chaired the Governor's Steering Committee to develop a plan to implement the Affordable Care Act in Maine.

Trish has also held appointed positions under five Maine governors – directing the aging office, Medicaid and state health agencies, and health planning and licensing programs. Trish served as a member of the Kaiser Commission on Medicaid and the Uninsured, and serves at the Institute of Medicine’s Board on Health Care Services, the National Academy for Social Insurance where she co-chaired the Study Panel on Medicaid and the Culture of Health. She was a founding member of the Medicaid and CHIP Payment and Access Commission (MACPAC).

Gordon H. Smith, Esq., Executive VP, Maine Medical Association
A Maine native, Gordon graduated from the University of Maine with highest distinction in 1973 and from the Boston College Law School, magna cum laude, in 1976. He practiced law before coming to the Maine Medical Association as General Counsel in 1981. He is a past Chairman of the American Society of State Medical Association Counsel, and the AMA/State Medical Societies Litigation Center. Gordon has also served as Chair of the American Medical Association/State Medical Society Litigation Center, the Maine Health Data Organization and the Advocacy Resource Center of the American Medical Association. He currently serves as a member of the Steering Committee of the AMA's Scope of Practice Partnership. He is also a former Chair of the Board of Quality Counts, a regional quality improvement collaborative and a former board member of the Maine Association of Area Agencies on Aging. He is a current board member of Onpoint Health Data and the Daniel Hanley Center for Health Leadership. A frequent lecturer to medical groups on various medical legal subjects, Mr. Smith has served as Executive Vice President of the Maine Medical Association since September 1993.
Martha Morrison, Founding Director, MedHelp Maine

MedHelp Maine, a nonprofit dedicated to increasing Mainers’ access to affordable medicines. The primary focus is the creation of centralized prescription assistance programs to which local practitioners can refer patients unable to obtain needed meds. With a master’s degree in hospital administration and extensive experience in hospital ancillary and support functions and in health care marketing and planning, Martha has guided the development of prescription assistance programs at seven Maine hospitals which has served as models for other hospitals. Together these medication access resources are helping thousands of patients of hundreds of Maine prescriber’s, while also preventing millions of dollars’ worth of avoidable ER visits and hospitalizations annually. A lifelong learner and busy retiree, Martha serves on various boards and advisory councils and is a regular presence at USM, where she has completed certificate programs in medical case management, gerontology, and public health, and is currently enrolled in courses in regulatory compliance and poverty and hunger.

Liz Harmon, Parent Advocate

Liz Harmon is a mother, lobster-woman, and cosmetologist in Brooksville, Maine. When Liz gave birth to her son, Orin, he was born with a serious heart condition and she quickly became caught up in a maze of bureaucracy trying to access the health care services he needed.

Liz first called CAHC’s HelpLine in 2014 and at the time was completely overwhelmed in trying to figure out how to navigate the health care system, including both MaineCare and the new health insurance Marketplace. Liz worked tirelessly to advocate for her son and her family. Despite all barriers, Liz refused to give up until her family had the health coverage they needed and were entitled to. But she didn’t stop there. After witnessing firsthand the obstacles and bureaucracy involved in navigating our health care system, Liz became an advocate for others and a champion for CAHC. She encouraged others in her community to apply for coverage and to challenge denials. When cuts to Medicaid were proposed or when the ACA and Marketplace were under attack, Liz was an active spokeswoman, sharing her story with multiple reporters to showcase the important role these programs play for families in Maine.

In 2015, Liz again recounted her family’s experience to the press and policymakers to educate people about the immense obstacles eligible families face in obtaining Medicaid, and why it is vital that ombudsman services exist to advocate for people and help them navigate the health care system. Liz came all the way down to Augusta to deliver in person legislative testimony in support of LD 1498, a bill to require the Maine Department of Health and Human Services to contract with a Maine nonprofit to provide ombudsman services to people on MaineCare. Thanks to Liz’s support and testimony, LD 1498 passed with overwhelming bipartisan support.
Mainers for Health Care Leadership Team

The Mainers for Health Care leadership team is a group of people who have served as leaders in the effort to pass Medicaid expansion both at the legislature in recent years and at the ballot in 2017. They know firsthand the devastating impacts the lack of health care has on our families and communities. With this knowledge, members of the Mainers for Health Care Leadership Team came together with organizations and other stakeholders to help launch the Medicaid expansion ballot campaign. They gathered signatures, knocked on doors, shared their stories and lead the statewide effort that resulted in the making of history in Maine and across the country when Mainers voted to pass expansion at the polls last November. They worked on behalf of many Mainers including people most marginalized by the health care crisis, people suffering with addiction or living with mental health challenges, and unable to afford necessary treatment. Members of the leadership team continue their work to make sure Medicaid expansion is implemented as soon as possible. Their courage and leadership is an inspiration to us all!

Maine Providers Standing Up for Health Care

Maine Providers Standing up for Health Care is a group of over 600 healthcare providers including doctors, nurses, behavioral health specialists, advanced practice professionals, dentists, physical therapists, midwives, and concerned citizens advocating for improving health care for the people of Maine. Maine Providers Standing up for Health Care’s mission is to inform and influence health care policy based on vast experience caring for the people of Maine. The organization is still growing and has worked hard to effect change on a number of important healthcare issues that are vital to the people of Maine including preserving the Affordable Care Act and advocating for passage and implementation of Medicaid expansion. They have worked with elected representatives, held press conferences, written editorials, and taken to the streets to knock on doors of neighbors to talk about why affordable coverage is important to all Mainers. Learn more about Maine Providers Standing Up for Health Care at www.standupme.org.