



American Heart Association's Fight Against Heart Disease in the Capital Region



By Cierra Orlyk

Imagine a world in which people with heart disease are exiled to bedrest and considered a lost cause fated for imminent death. This is the scary reality that existed before the creation of the American Heart Association (AHA) in 1924.

On June 10, 1924, six cardiologists, including Dr. Paul Dudley White of Boston, came together to end the correlation of heart disease with a death sentence. They created a professional society that aimed to increase and improve cardiovascular research while maintaining commitment to public health. These doctors believed that better research could be the key to the treatment and prevention of cardiovascular disease. People agreed, and by 1948, this society transformed into a nationwide voluntary health organization backed by thousands of scientists, physicians and volunteers. Today, the organization boasts over 33 million volunteers and supporters.

The AHA is thought to have come to Albany in 1948, according to the organization's Senior Director of Communications, Katherine McCarthy. Since then, the Capital Region branch has functioned as the base of New York's statewide efforts. The chapter is fueled by the fact that heart disease and stroke are the number one and number five causes of death in our area, respectively. In efforts to resolve this, the association is currently funding about \$1.5 million in research grants across the Capital Region. The organization also has other goals, like raising the tax on tobacco products, ensuring adequate funding for the state's public health programs, adopting a tax onto sugary drinks, supporting

policies that encourage Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) participation and helping implement healthier transportation and eating options in the Albany area.

In addition to pursuing those goals, the AHA quickly acted to address the increased risk of the COVID-19 virus for cardiac and stroke patients. The organization funded \$2.5 million to research the link between the novel coronavirus and cardiovascular disease, continued to train first responders in CPR in a socially-distanced fashion, educated hospital staff on how to correctly use ventilators and created a COVID-19 Registry to ensure the virus is studied not only now, but in the future, too. It also successfully hosted events via digital platforms for safe celebration and education.

The AHA is no stranger to success; it aided in establishing the Pulse Ox Law in 2014, which requires that all newborn infants have their oxygen levels tested before they are discharged from the hospital and helped pass the CPR in Schools Law in 2015, which mandates that students learn Hands-Only CPR before graduating high school.

Despite the organization's plenty of achievements, there is still more work to be done. The Capital Region sector of the AHA is asking that residents join in the fight against heart disease this month by wearing red and/or illuminating your home or business in red. Learn more about upcoming events and volunteer opportunities at www.heart.org/albanyny or @AHANewYork on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter.



February is American Heart Month!

*Friday, February 5 is **Wear Red Day** to support the fight against heart disease in women. Also look for the Capital Region buildings illuminated in red to show their support!

*February 7-14 is **Congenital Heart Defect Awareness Week** in honor of the 1 in 100 children born with a congenital heart defect.