



WHATCOM COUNTY PUBLIC HEALTH ADVISORY BOARD MEETING MINUTES

JANUARY 6, 2022

Present: Steve Bennett, Sterling Chick (Chair), Leah Wainman, Lindsey Karas, Les Seelye
Absent: Barry Buchanan, Jake Anderson
Excused:

Topic	Discussion/Outcome
Call to order	Leah presented a land acknowledgement. Roll call of Public Health Advisory Board (PHAB) Members.
Approve Minutes	Sterling moved that the minutes from the November meeting be approved as presented. The board voted and the motion passed. Ayes: 5, Nays: 0, Abstain: 0
Public Comment	None.
New Data Dashboard Overview	<p>Amy Hockenberry, Whatcom County Health Department, presented an overview of work the Health Information and Assessment team at the Health Department are doing with the Power BI data analytic platform and bringing on a new position to help modernize our data systems.</p> <p>Regarding the use of Power BI:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Before the pandemic hit, the data team was looking at different analytic platforms, but had not yet landed on one. When the pandemic began the state Department of Health (DOH) quickly partnered with Microsoft to build dashboards with Power BI, which have also been featured on our website. This experience helped the team reach a decision to use Power BI as our analytical platform going forward. • The summer of 2020 we had two staff, Katie Stanford and Morris Arthur, who took on learning the platform and have shared their knowledge with others on our team as time allowed. • The platform has been used in a multitude of ways, one being adding dashboards to our website for Whatcom County specific COVID data which is intended to complement, not duplicate, the DOH dashboards. • Power BI allows for more data modeling and analytics than we were able to do previously. • Upcoming projects that will use Power BI include replacing the Community Health Status Assessment with a population health indicator platform featuring interactive data dashboards that will allow community partners and the public access to population health indicators, that will be stratified by subpopulations when possible. • One of the great functions of Power BI is being able to use application programming interfaces (APIs) which will provide links between data sources and our data dashboards for regular updates. Not every data source will have an API, so we will still schedule regular platform updates, but the APIs will help us immensely. • Power BI will also be used to develop performance measures dashboards to inform program planning and evaluation. <p>Regarding modernizing our data systems:</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We are looking at hiring a public health informatics specialist to focus on modernizing our data systems. This will improve our ability to collect, manage, and report data from our programs and will allow us to be more efficient at evaluating our programs and reporting out on those programs. <p>Erika Lautenbach, Health Department Director, shared an example of how modernizing the data systems will be of benefit. Between the City of Bellingham and the Health Department, about 10 million dollars a year go into homeless services programs. Being able to look in real time at where that money goes, which programs are being funded at what level, etc., rather than having to wait for quarterly reports, will help us better understand where we are having an impact and how to improve.</p> <p>Questions and discussion included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Catholic Community Services uses Power BI and Sterling finds it easy to digest as a communication tool. As you modernize data systems, are you doing so in alignment with any other parts of the County, other community organizations, or with state Foundational Public Health Services? More work will be done on this after our new position is hired, but we aim to build in operability to work with other organizations as much as possible. Congratulations to Amy and her team for their work on this. These changes are huge even when we're not in a pandemic. This has the opportunity to be transformative for many in the health department. Data only does good to the extent that people can access and communicate it. Amy gave kudos to Katie Stanford and Morris Arthur for their work on this initiative. Our goal is to be transparent with standardized and useful data. The Population Health Platform will be a repository for people to go to find data they need for things like writing grants and to inform community work, whether the Health Department is a direct part of that work or not.
<p>Health/Human Services Flood Response Overview</p>	<p>Erika noted that initially the plan for the agenda was to spend this time reporting on the flood response, but given the significant surge we find ourselves in, we will do a short COVID report and then a short report on the flood response.</p> <p>Cindy Hollinsworth, Whatcom County Health Department gave a high level operational COVID update:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Case numbers are exceptionally high right now, four times what we have seen previously. A lot of our case contact investigations have been turned over to the state Department of Health. Given the high number of cases, DOH are prioritizing which cases they can get to and many cases are not getting contact investigations. We are seeing lots of cases in school aged kids, so our school response team and our health officers have been focusing on our work with schools. We are also seeing outbreaks at many long-term care facilities and congregate living facilities. PeaceHealth updates their dashboard daily and yesterday they were at 47 COVID positive patients. Our Isolation and Quarantine Facility is completely full right now. We are working through some strategies to allow early release from isolation based on negative antigen tests. Testing is backed up here, which we're seeing all over the country. Online appointments for testing are several days out, but if you call the Health Department or Northwest Labs, we still have the ability to get exposed or symptomatic folks tested within a day or two. Vaccine availability is stressed, too, but you can find appointments. We are coordinating some pop-up clinics, primarily in geographically remote areas of Whatcom County. Those clinics are on our website and updated daily. The state Department of Health and the federal government are both launching initiatives for distributing rapid antigen tests directly to residents. We have a pallet of rapid antigen tests coming to us, and we are working with Unity Care who are getting a supply of these tests. They will be distributed to some of our highest risk communities. <p>Questions and discussion included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is emerging research showing that omicron doesn't always show up on rapid tests. Can the Health Department do some messaging about that? Also, certainly some home test results are not being reported and we are undercounting cases. Is that something we can provide messaging to the public on? Yes, Cindy will bring both of those issues up with the communications team.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • True case counts have never been a reality – though that may be worse now than in the past with an increase in home testing. • There is a CDC app for people to self-report positive home tests. • When making the plan for distribution of test kits, please consider daycare facilities. They try to adhere to K-12 guidance, but without the same resources for testing. Waiting days for testing before you can return to childcare can be hard for families, especially for low income families that may not have flexible work places. • Once we have more tests and they aren't solely going to our highest risk folks, we would like to expand distribution to people who are coming into regular contact with the public in their workplaces, like service industry, restaurant workers, etc. • What is the backup plan if we max out the isolation and quarantine facility? We are working on identifying and standing up a second site with space for another 25 people. • Many schools on the east coast are pivoting to online instruction, is that likely to happen here? When schools initially went online in 2020, we were in a different situation because almost everything was closed. Now, most places are open and parents need to be at work, so it will be much harder if schools go online. Some schools in Whatcom County have had to go online due to staff shortages or because so many students are out, but we aren't currently closing schools solely as a mitigation measure. There is a statewide push to keep schools open. <p>The flood event in November impacted over 1,500 homes in north and east Whatcom County. The Health Department has been involved with the flood response in a number of ways.</p> <p>Overview of the role of the Health Department in the response:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There was an incredible amount of solid waste and concerns about hazardous waste that came from the flood. The Health Department's environmental health division staffed and stood up the Halverston Pit which took in the debris from flood-damaged homes, then transitioned that to allow a contractor to do that work. • We also worked with the community to address hazardous waste concerns and concerns about on-site septic assessments, including working with the Executive's Office on waiving some of the fees for those needing to repair or replace those systems. • Our human services division has also been heavily involved in the response. Hundreds of families lost homes, and given the already existing shortage of supplies and contractors that can do that work, it could be a significant length of time before some of those families are able to get back into their homes. The Health Department worked to get families in need into short term housing options like hotels. Mauri Ingram and the Whatcom Community Foundation worked closely with the Health Department providing resources for housing support. • Whatcom Unified Command this week stood up a long-term recovery task force, which the Health Department is a part of. • Erika expressed thanks to Sue Sullivan, Ann Beck, Astrid Newell, and others in the Health Department for their work on this effort. In addition, many thanks to our community partners like Whatcom Community Foundation. • Committee members expressed thanks to all those involved in this relief effort. • Mauri Ingram from Whatcom Community Foundation noted that she is grateful for the partnership and the dedication of the Health Department team, ACH, CCS and others. Looking forward to our collective assessment of areas for improvement, particularly interagency agreements and readily accessible funding in preparation for future events.
<p>Racial Equity Update</p>	<p>Steve Bennett reported on the work of the Racial Equity Subcommittee. The group planned and facilitated a meeting with members and staff representatives of other Health Department boards and commissions to talk about how to move forward the Department's racial equity work and to operationalize the racism resolution.</p> <p>Overview of the meeting:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The meeting was attended by representatives from the Food Systems Committee, The Child and Family Wellbeing Task Force, the Behavioral Health Advisory Committee, the Solid Waste Advisory Committee, the Developmental Disabilities Advisory Board, Opportunity Council, and the Incarceration Prevention and Reduction Task Force. • When asked where they are on their racial equity journey, most groups felt they were just getting going.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There was some discussion on barriers groups were facing in meeting their racial equity goals including representation and recruitment, as well as community engagement. There was an awareness that we want diverse representation, but we don't want to put the responsibility for this work onto BIPOC folks, and that often the same individuals seem to get tapped over and over for this kind of work. • There are also systemic barriers between the community and the County which can impede engagement including things like language barriers, overuse of government-speak, Robert's Rules of Order, etc. • There was also a lot of discussion on trainings, with attendees eager to find and engage in anti-bias training that is evidence-based with proven efficacy. Community engagement training for government employees would also be useful to better reach community. • Some discussion centered on the Whatcom Racial Equity Commission (WREC). Those at the meeting expressed interest in learning more about WREC's plans and working in coordination with them. To that end, WREC attended a subcommittee meeting with us and we are building a partnership to make sure we are moving in a mutually beneficial direction. WREC will likely be useful for helping with community engagement and recruitment. • One of the overarching things that was achieved was a sense of motivation and partnership for those who participated. The idea is not necessarily for this group of boards and commissions to meet regularly, but to possibly meet a couple more times to lay some groundwork for collectively advancing our goals around racial equity work.
Meeting Schedule/Time for 2022	<p>We sent a survey out to see what each member would prefer for meeting times. Unfortunately, there was no consensus and there were two difficult to overlap camps. Our early morning time can be difficult for families, but regular office hours can be hard for other folks. It seems like it would be best to stay with 7 or go to an evening time (5 or later), but we can keep a hybrid option on the table even when we eventually go back to meeting in person.</p> <p>Discussion regarding meeting times centered on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The hybrid option offers some valuable flexibility. • We should look at our standard mode of operation for hybrid, as it can be difficult to be inclusive with both in person and virtual. • As both a parent and an employee, the 7 am time gets in the way of both those roles. We should keep our equity lens in mind in making these decisions. Do we want to be reflective of the professional community or the community at large? • This is not just about our members, but also about community engagement. How many times have we had community show up and speak? It is rare and our early meeting time may play a role in that. • A potential solution to the community engagement issue might be to consider hosting community engagement events. Those could be scheduled in the evening and maybe focused on particular topics.
Elections of Chair and Vice Chair	<p>Sterling nominated Steve Bennett to serve as chair for the next year, Leah seconded the nomination, and Steve was elected chair. Ayes: 4, Nays: 0, Abstain: 1</p> <p>Steve nominated Leah Wainman to serve as vice chair for the next year, Sterling seconded the nomination, and Leah was elected vice chair. Ayes: 4, Nays: 0, Abstain: 1</p>
Big Work for 2022	<p>Erika gave an overview of the work being planned for the Health Department for 2022. This work falls into three areas – work force, strategic, and operational.</p> <p>Work force:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our Health Department has been facing unprecedented challenges, both intellectual and emotional, over the last couple of years and it is very important that we support staff in terms of burnout prevention, skill development, leadership development, and resilience. • There have been lots of changes recently in Health Department leadership and staff. We are all working on congealing as a team. Part of supporting staff and ensuring staff retention will depend on continuing to create a strong leadership team. • We are working with Sea Mar to transition our GRACE and LEAD programs into the Health Department when the Sea Mar contract ends at the end of March. GRACE and LEAD are intervention and prevention programs for high utilizers of our emergency and criminal justice systems. This is a big change that will add upwards of fifteen staff to the Health Department. Many thanks to Malora Christensen, manager of those programs, for her leadership and partnership on this transition.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We've talked before about Foundational Public Health Services (FPHS). FPHS funding through the state will allow us to add several new permanent positions in 2022. <p>Strategic:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kate Dabe, our COVID Manager, is working on a COVID strategic and operational plan, to help move the department's COVID work from crisis mode to something more sustainable and manageable. • We have a very outdated strategic plan that was initially developed in 2014. We have seen many changes since then that require us to revise, revamp, and rethink our strategic plan in 2022. • Community Health Improvement Plan work with Healthy Whatcom is ongoing and will be a big part of our work for 2022. • We've talked a lot about the Child and Family Wellbeing Task Force which PHAB was instrumental in standing up, and their work will continue in 2022. • There is a ballot measure being planned by our community partners for children and families in 2022. We will provide data and serve as subject matter experts for that effort. • We want to continue to integrate racial equity work into our operations and all our strategic work. Steve outlined that initial conversation with all the boards and commissions really well and we will be building on that effort. • As we have discussed, there is the need to change the Health Board composition or the PHAB composition or both. • We are revamping our performance management system to better reflect our goals and strategic priorities. • We just found out last night that we were successful in applying for an extension for our reaccreditation status. The documentation isn't due until June 2023, but much of the work will happen during 2022. <p>Operational:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will likely be doing a reorganization, especially with the new division being created to encompass the GRACE and LEAD programs. • Data modernization work will progress in 2022. • We have master planning to do for space needs and hybrid/flexible work. As you all know, the Waystation is moving forward which will require that staff located at our State Street building need to relocate in Q3 or Q4 of this year. Those plans will be informed by all we have learned about our ability to work remotely and in hybrid settings and to create flexibility for staff, while making sure we are still team-building in the process. • Website and branding changes are coming with an eye to build something more user-friendly. • EnerGov should be implemented in 2022. It is intended to streamline and make permitting processes electronic and more user-friendly.
<p>Meeting Evaluation</p>	<p>Les – commended the data modernization work being done and how it will add responsiveness and transparency, wishes folks would just get vaccinated, commended the amazing flood response, the communication and outreach on racial equity work is great, participation problems are not limited to PHAB. I think we are on the right track and appreciate the work of the Health Department.</p> <p>Lindsay – commended Erika and the Health Department for their focus for the upcoming year and is happy to be supporting that work however possible.</p> <p>Steve – it's good to move into 2022 with a meeting that felt motivational. It is about moving forward even amidst the current wave and shows the resilience of the Health Department and the people here.</p> <p>Leah – the Health Department has been such a leader in the community and shown such grace. I'm in awe of what you have done and your plans for the future.</p> <p>Erika – thanks for all the kind words! I'm looking forward to working with all of you on these big initiatives and feel like we have great momentum, and a great core group of PHAB members that bring such skill and insight.</p> <p>Sterling – thanks to Steve and Erika for all their help this year, as well as Astrid Newell, Judy Ziels, Allison Williams, Jennifer Gay, and Samantha Murdoch from the Health Department.</p>

Adjourn	8:36 am
<i>Next Meeting</i>	Next regular meeting March 3, 2022, 7:00 – 8:30 a.m. <u>VIRTUAL</u>