

**EL PASO COUNTY PUBLIC HEALTH**  
**October 27, 2021**  
**BOARD OF HEALTH MINUTES**

The El Paso County Board of Health met at 1675 West Garden of the Gods Road, Suite 2044, Colorado Springs, Colorado, on October 27, 2021. Eight Board of Health members were physically present, one participated virtually through Microsoft Teams.

Dr. James Terbush, President, called the meeting to order at 8:31 a.m.

**Board of Health Members:**

Dr. James Terbush, President – in person  
Doris Ralston, Vice President – in person  
Councilmember Dave Donelson – in person  
Commissioner Cami Bremer- in person  
Ted Collas- in person  
Councilmember Sam Gieck – (Teams)  
Commissioner Longinos Gonzalez, Jr. – in person  
Kari Kilroy – in person  
Dr. Richard Vu- in person

**Directors Present:**

Susan Wheelan, Director – in person  
DeAnn Ryberg, Deputy Director – in person  
Dr. Robin Johnson, Medical Director- in person  
Heather Graves, Community Health Promotion Director- Teams  
Brenda Heimbach, Health Services Director- Teams  
Michelle Beyrle, Public Health Information Officer- in person  
Jared Verner, Deputy Public Health Information Officer- in person

**Others Present at Regular Session:**

Leti Aranda	Becca Barnhart	Teresa Bassma	Vicki Bennett	Ashley Busch
Lori Cleaton	Natalia Gayou	Dee Lambert	Diana May	Samantha Montmeny
Lisa Powell	Mary Ritchie	Melissa Seidenberg	Nikki Simmons	Julissa Soto
Summer South	Kelsey Tillema	Nora Todd	Fadi Youkhana	Haley Zachary

Two American Sign Language Interpreters from Sign Language Network

**Board Member Roll Call**

*See above*

**Approval of Agenda**

Dr. Terbush entertained a motion to approve the agenda.

**MOVED:** by Doris Ralston seconded by Commissioner Longinos Gonzalez to approve the agenda for the October 27, 2021 meeting.

**MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.**

## **Board of Health Comments**

Commissioner Bremer stated the El Paso County Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) passed a thoughtfully worded resolution that was somewhat misrepresented through media sources. She brought copies of the resolution to share with the Board of Health. She emphasized the BOCC resolution was a stand against mandates, not a statement against vaccinations. The BOCC encourages individuals to make decisions for themselves inclusive of medical provider inputs. Commissioner Bremer noted the Commissioners wish to find a balanced approach to navigating vaccinations and she emphasized her strong support for the region's medical systems.

Dr. Terbush stated that the Board of Health's goal is for all to get vaccinated. The Board of Health is science based, data driven, and focused on best practices and also recognizes a need for a pragmatic approach. He appreciates Cami's leadership and sharing of information.

Kari Kilroy stated that she appreciates the Board of County Commissioners and respectfully expressed disagreement with the resolution passed. Of University of Colorado Health's (UCHealth) more than 26,000 employees, she stated less than 0.5% of employees were lost due to individuals not following vaccination requirements. Prior to the mandates, over 85% of employees were vaccinated. She stated that within hospitals, 100% of employees are expected to have flu vaccinations completed. She stated hospital workers are currently under much pressure and strain. She proposed the Board of Health pass a resolution noting the safety and effectiveness of vaccines and supporting vaccinations for the community and for healthcare workers.

Commissioner Gonzalez stated that the BOCC resolution was not developed to contest the effectiveness of vaccines and he has personally fought strongly for the distribution and use of the vaccine as a tool against COVID-19. However, he emphasized a universal government mandate is not appropriate.

Doris Ralston thanked Public Health Director Susan Wheelan and the Public Health team for their work in a difficult environment. Prevention often does not get much recognition, but it is central to Public Health work. With regard to hospitals, she stated much of the strain is the understaffing of workers. Noting it is not possible for everyone to be pleased, she stated the Board of Health needs to make the best decisions it can for the El Paso County community.

Dr. Vu offered his interpretation of the County Commissioners' proclamation and stated there is likely more agreement than disagreement on the topic of vaccinations among the Board of Health. He feels the only disagreement is the level at which mandates should occur.

Councilmember Dave Donelson stated that the good of health along with the good of freedom must be balanced without creating a divisive environment. He does not think it is unanimous among the medical community that mandatory vaccines should occur, specifically in children due to their lower risk of contracting COVID-19. He stated the polarizing effect a forced mandate has, in our community, transformed vaccines into a freedom issue.

Dr. Terbush read a personal letter into the record. He noted a reminder that the Board of Health's mission is to promote and protect public health.

Ted Collas appreciates the County Commissioners and City Councilmembers that serve on the Board of Health and noted the challenges faced as they navigate various public opinions on vaccination. He agrees with Dr. Terbush that the Board of Health must stand together to support the community's health care needs.

Commissioner Bremer stated her purpose in raising the topic of the county resolution was to have a valuable discussion around the intent of the proclamation. She wanted to clarify to colleagues on the Board of Health

that the Board of County Commissioners did not approach the proclamation without considerable thought, and the Board of County Commissioners continues to take vaccinations and issues of public health very seriously.

Dr. Terbush stated that Kari Kilroy's request for a proclamation regarding vaccinations remains an open topic. He asked that Kari work with Director Wheelan and the Public Health team to draft a resolution for the Board of Health.

Commissioner Gonzalez noted an article in the newspaper today discussing the state settlement on the opioid crisis. He recommended the Board read that article and commended the State Attorney General in negotiations on that issue. He wanted to highlight that the negotiations that included El Paso County Commissioners resulted in the state of Colorado keeping millions more in funding than would have otherwise been available for Colorado and our county if the BOCC had not been involved in the negotiations. He is proud of the BOCC and staff members for the efforts made to assist residents who are in need and struggling with addiction.

Dr. Terbush closed Board member comments by reading a thank you note from the Fountain City Council thanking El Paso County Public Health and Board of Health for their work.

### **Public Health Champion Awards**

Leti Aranda was recognized for volunteering at many COVID-19 vaccination Points of Dispensing (PODs). She initially helped volunteer at an equity clinic at our Public Health South location designed specifically for our Spanish-speaking community members. Leti reached out to Lisa Powell, Emergency Preparedness and Response Manager, to continue to be involved. Lisa Powell stated many people did not return to the second equity clinic to receive their second shot and Leti called 150 people who did not return, encouraging them to receive their second dose. The Public Health team greatly appreciated her time, support, and her work as a trusted member of the community.

Leti thanked Public Health for the opportunity and stated it is a pleasure to connect with her community to discuss Public Health. She appreciates that bilingual, bicultural individuals are included in our community outreach efforts.

Julissa Soto stated having government and community leaders working together transforms communities and Leti's work has been transformative.

### **Approval of Board of Health Minutes**

Dr. Terbush asked for approval of the September 22, 2021 Board Meeting minutes.

**MOVED:** by Doris Ralston, seconded by Kari Kilroy to ratify the minutes from the September 22, 2021 Board of Health meeting.

**MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.**

### **Director's Report**

Director Wheelan asked Fadi Youkhana, Epidemiologist, to provide a data update. Fadi stated that El Paso County is 71% vaccinated (individuals receiving at least one shot), and 65% fully vaccinated. Data displaying vaccination information indicated more citizens are receiving their booster shots than are coming in for their initial vaccine doses to complete the original series. We anticipate that in the first week of November, the denominator of the calculation will change due to those ages 5-11 entering eligibility for vaccination. It is also anticipated that 10-30% of the eligible 5–11-year-olds in our county will be vaccinated in the first eight weeks of the vaccination release to this age group. This estimate is consistent with nationally run studies by the Kaiser Foundation. Director Wheelan stated we anticipate vaccine supplies available to vaccinate the 5-11-year-old population on November 5. Clinics have been planning with our partners in the El Paso County and Colorado Springs Vaccination Consortium. Also, at the Public Health South building in Fountain, vaccination clinics are being offered November 5-7. The Citizens Service Center will offer vaccinations and the Southeast Women, Infants & Children (WIC) Clinic will offer a vaccination clinic during the first weekend in November. We are also partnering with Cheyenne Mountain Zoo to provide vaccines. In addition to increased vaccination preparations, there are also efforts moving forward to facilitate monoclonal antibody (mAB) treatments. The team is steadily working on many aspects of the response to have resources available to the public.

Commissioner Bremer asked about the mobile vaccines capabilities related to the 5-11 age group and asked what schools must do if they wish to hold mobile clinics. Director Wheelan stated the team has advanced timelines and some schools are already scheduled for mobile clinics. Parental consent is a critical part of that process and it is preferred that a parent or guardian is available at the time of vaccination. Vaccines for those aged 5-11 years will also be available at mass vaccination sites and public health is working to maximize options to ensure parents have access to vaccines for their children.

Fadi stated that the advisory board to the FDA and CDC approved use of vaccines based on trial data finding the vaccines are safe and about 90% effective in the 5-11 age group population. This is a first step in the approval process. A vaccinations vs. incidence graph of the top 10 most populated counties in Colorado note that higher incidence aligns to lower vaccination rates within the state. A COVID-19 case incidence by age group chart indicates lower age groups are taking the lead in infection. Hospitalizations by age data is showing the adult population continues to show the highest hospitalization rates. Recently, lower age groups are increased in hospitalizations. Graphs showing incidence, hospitalization, and deaths were compared, noting they follow the same general trends; however, we did not see the number of deaths mirrored in the fourth wave due to the effectiveness of vaccines in early 2021. A warning sign is that in the fifth wave, deaths and hospitalizations are starting to more closely mirror the case numbers due to the elevated level of incidence. The vaccination protection can only go as far as the exposure. If the exposure is high and consistent the vaccine protection is going to be challenged. High levels of hospital census indicate a troubling trend of increased admissions, which has caused hospitals to be strained and to limit elective procedures.

Dr. Johnson, Public Health Medical Director, stated current hospitalizations reflect the incidence of the high plateau, so we can expect hospitalizations and census to track upwards moving forward. \ We can anticipate stresses on the hospital systems will persist through November and December, increasing if we do not turn the tide of infection. Colorado Hospital Association internal staff letter communications and hospital leader outreach convey the current COVID-19 surge is as severe as any so far and is more prolonged. Care is deferred and delayed in the case of non-emergent procedures, so when people do present, they are in more dire straits, which is not how hospitals wish to continue healthcare. There are staff challenges due largely to burn-out and moral distress, threats, and sky-rocketing costs. Hospitals are beyond surge capacity with ICU and critical care patients waiting for beds. There is consistently 12 percent or greater positivity for testing in the hospital system, reflecting the heavy burden of disease within the community. The hospitals are working to optimize capacities to avoid diverting patients which delays patient care. Hospitals are postponing non-emergent cases. More than 98 percent of COVID-19 patients are Colorado residents. Hospitals are working to incentivize staff. They are working on innovation, advocating for the monoclonal antibody treatment, remote patient monitoring,

education, and collaboration with other agencies. The hospitals ask that Public Health speak to promote and educate around prevention measures- vaccinations, mask wearing, and testing to slow the spread of COVID-19. They are preparing for crisis standards of care. They wish to support the effectiveness of vaccinations and note that risk of disease far outweighs risk of vaccination. She stated there are two to three times more reinfections with “natural immunity” compared to vaccine immunity. Commissioner Gonzalez asked where that data is sourced. Dr. Johnson said that information comes from multiple studies and she can provide a reference to the Board. Dr. Johnson stated that vaccination minimizes the disease process. The disease process involves cell death, organ dysfunction, and scarring. Dr. Johnson stated we needed to seek out credible resources and share these resources with our communities so they can make wise decisions regarding vaccination.

Councilmember Donelson asked if there was a study from Israel stating natural acquired immunity is as effective or more effective than immunizations. Dr. Johnson stated that information from that community is evolving. Recent studies indicate antibodies made through natural immunity are variable and we cannot count on effective immunity through natural methods. We know that vaccination immunity is effective and more stable, so the most consistent and robust immunity we have is through vaccination.

Dr. Terbush noted that the flu update will be postponed to a future meeting.

### **Financial Report**

Samantha Montmeny, Budget Supervisor - Health and Human Services, presented the 2022 Budget highlights. Critical Needs formerly presented to the BOCC included ten new positions as part of the 5-year road map supporting Public Health. This year, Public Health has requested an additional \$150,000 of ongoing funding.. We will find out in November if that is approved by the BOCC. Increases in revenue for 2022 are largely due to one-time COVID-19 pandemic grant funds and are time-limited. These funds will be ending. Director Wheelan clarified that the additional request to the BOCC for \$150,000 in 2022 is part of the 5-year funding plan and the request is to use the fund balance to maintain the ten Critical Needs positions. The request does not include adding any additional staff members. She noted Public Health does what can be done with the funds provided, yet agency staffing must be maintained, it is a work in progress, and the current pace is not sustainable.

Kari Kilroy referenced the number of FTEs in the department and stated El Paso County Public Health is way below the national average, is understaffed, and staffing is an effort the Board must address to make circumstances sustainable.

Dr. Terbush stated that given the current environment it is difficult to find staff, but it must be a focus. He asked the average number of staff for populations the size of El Paso County’s and Director Wheelan stated that average number is 269 full time equivalent employees (FTE). Director Wheelan recommends connecting with state legislators to pursue state funding and indicated additional options should be discussed. Dr. Terbush suggested the Board establish a committee to develop goals for funding towards 269 FTEs.

Ted Collas asked if some Public Health positions were going to be funded by the reserve fund balance and asked about that duration. Director Wheelan stated we were at 28% of the fund balance, which is not sustainable. The Board of Health policy is to be at 18-21% fund balance but in order to reach long-term funding goals, the strategy was to use the fund balance incrementally to get to \$1,000,000 in County funding. Samantha Montmeny stated as of 2020, the fund balance was increased by about \$2,700,000. In 2021, we are budgeted to decrease the fund balance by \$860,000 and in 2022, the preliminary budget decreases the fund balance by another \$280,000. As the Critical Needs are approved with the BOCC, and the funding is increased, that should help offset those numbers. Director Wheelan stated 2020 and 2021 have not been normal years given the funding that has been received for COVID-19 and there are many different dynamics in action.

Samantha presented the 2022 Preliminary Balanced Budget compared to 2021 Adopted Budget. The County has provided an additional \$1,000,000 in American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding. The State has provided an additional \$1,000,000 per year for three years.. The 2022 Preliminary Balanced Budget is expected to reduce the fund balance by \$286,000, which is not inclusive of the Critical Needs funding that was requested of the BOCC.

Commissioner Bremer expressed interest in the Board engaging in a work session to include the entire Board of Health and Budget staff focused on increasing funding for Public Health staffing. Dr. Terbush stated either a whole Board of Health work session or a strategically-focused smaller committee would be appropriate. Diana May, County Attorney, noted that a meeting of three or more Board members would be noted as a Public Meeting, but this could be a working session and it would need to be posted appropriately. Director Wheelan stated that this is a work in progress and asked to take some time to be thoughtful about what the future looks like for the community and Public Health needs.

Samantha presented contracts for review. These contracts are: Drug Free Communities: Youth Substance Use Prevention in Fountain Valley, and Women, Infants, and Children (WIC). The Drug Free Communities contract is a new contract for \$125,000 per year to target marijuana and prescription drug opioids among youth in the Fountain Valley area. The WIC contract is a renewal with a slight increase just under \$63,000.

**MOVED:** by Commissioner Cami Bremer, seconded by Ted Collas to approve the Drug Free Communities, Youth Substance Use Prevention in Fountain Valley and the Women, Infants, and Children contracts.

**MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.**

#### **Public Comment**

None

#### **Executive Session**

Diana May stated that Pursuant to C.R.S. § 24-6-402(4)(b), the County Attorney's Office is requesting an Executive Session with the Board of Health regarding Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE) Public Health Orders and guidance implemented in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, to include: legal advice on specific legal questions relating to COVID-19 Guidance for Schools.

**MOVED:** by Doris Ralston, seconded by Commissioner Longinos Gonzalez to enter into Executive Session.

**MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The Board entered into Executive Session at 10:35am and exited at 12:49 pm.

#### **Next Board of Health meeting**

The next Board of Health meeting will be:

**Wednesday, December 15, 2021, 8:30 a.m. - 10:30 a.m.**, located at Centennial Hall Auditorium at 200 S. Cascade Ave.

Adjournment at 12:50 pm.

27 October 2021- BOH/MSeidenberg