

**EL PASO COUNTY PUBLIC HEALTH**

**February 23, 2022**

**BOARD OF HEALTH MINUTES**

The El Paso County Board of Health met at the Citizens Service Center at 1675 W. Garden of the Gods Road, Colorado Springs, Colorado, on February 23, 2022. Five Board of Health members were physically present and three attended on Teams.

Dr. James Terbush, President, called the meeting to order at 8:35 a.m.

**Board of Health Member Roll Call:**

*Present:*

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

**Directors Present:**

- DeAnn Ryberg, Deputy Public Health Director – in person
- Dr. Christopher Urbina, Interim Medical Director- Teams
- Heather Graves, Community Health Promotion Director- in person
- Brenda Heimbach, Health Services Director- Teams
- Michelle Beyrle, Public Health Information Officer- in person
- Jared Verner, Deputy Public Health Information Officer- in person
- Dr. Tarik Walker, Strategic Initiatives and Health Equity Officer- Teams

**Others Present at Regular Session:**

Vicki Bennett	Ashley Busch	Lori Cleaton	Ben Crum	Cindi DeBoer
Miriam Fleisher	Meghan Haynes	Ange-Elie Jean	Steve Johnson	Amy Kalmus
Marigny Klaber	Chief Jeff Kramer	Dee Lambert	Jordan Linder	Terri Massingill
Taline Meredith	Samantha Montmeny	Mary Ann Morrelli	Victoria Platt	Lisa Powell
Mary Ritchie	Melissa Seidenberg	Summer South	Heather Steinman	Tom Strand
Kelsey Tillema	Nora Todd	Christian Wright	Fadi Youkhana	Haley Zachary

Two American Sign Language Interpreters from Sign Language Network

Three members of the public present for Public Comment

**Approval of Agenda**

**MOVED:** by Councilmember Dave Donelson, seconded by Kari Kilroy to approve the agenda for the February 23, 2022 Board of Health meeting.

**MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY**

**Board of Health Comments**

Doris Ralston opened Board Comments thanking Public Health staff and partners on what has been accomplished on behalf of community health.

Commissioner Bremer agreed and thanked everyone for their patience as several meeting participants reported to the meeting remotely.

Commissioner Gonzalez stated he is pleased with the great work being done, noting data on the COVID-19 dashboard indicated positive trends. He also referenced information regarding fentanyl abuse and overdose deaths and stated support for legislative changes.

Dr. Terbush stated that information reported today is reflective of two years of response to COVID-19 and it is encouraging to see that numbers are falling. He stated appreciation for the hard and steady work of Public Health staff. He stated it is time to begin transitioning the approach to COVID-19 as it is going to be a regularly occurring part of our environment and of public health. He added a recent meeting was held with Jim Reid from the Pikes Peak Office of Emergency Management (PPROEM) and emphasized the importance of the collaboration between public health and public safety.

Councilmember Donelson echoed recognition of the Public Health team and expressed appreciation to staff for moving the location of the meeting to a larger room in the Citizens Service Center and for changing the order of the agenda to accommodate community participation.

### **Public Comment on Items not Scheduled on the Agenda**

Steven Walsh, county resident, provided comments opposing vaccination and asked for withdrawal of support for the vaccine.

### **Public Health Champion Awards**

DeAnn Ryberg, Public Health Deputy Director, recognized Cindy Aubrey, President and CEO of Pikes Peak United Way (PPUW), and the PPUW staff for their partnership in the COVID-19 response. Early in the response, PPUW collaborated with Public Health and the PPROEM to set up their 211 hotline as a main COVID-19 resource coordination center within the county. It is a free and confidential referral hotline staffed by multilingual trained information specialists. Between March and June 2020, the call center helped more than 12,000 individuals in El Paso and Teller Counties. In addition to answering general questions about COVID-19, the hotline was a valuable resource for community members who had questions regarding testing and protection guidance and those who had needs for food, housing assistance, utilities assistance, or mental health support. When vaccines became widely available in February 2021, the PPUW team served as a resource hub in the community, answering questions on eligibility for vaccination and sharing vaccine provider locations. In times of high volume, Cindy personally worked to establish free mental health resources for the hard-working volunteer team. The 211 call center has gone above and beyond under Cindy's leadership. They are dedicated public health partners and true Public Health Champions.

Cindy introduced members of her team: Heather Steinman, Ange-Elie Jean, and Miriam Fleisher and expressed that it has been a privilege to work with El Paso County Public Health. It has been a tremendous partnership and she is grateful for the honor.

Ted Collas shared that Cindy and her team have been advocates of the community for many years. The 211 network has given a voice to a segment of the community that is often overlooked. He appreciates the team doing all they can within their scope of authority to care for those in need.

DeAnn welcomed partners from Peak View Behavioral Health and recognized their outstanding contributions to COVID-19 response. Taline Meredith, CEO of Peak View Behavioral Health, and her team were critical community partners in connecting patients to appropriate care during the response. Recognizing the need to preserve hospital capacity as a critical component to protecting healthcare infrastructure, Public Health worked with partners at Peak View to identify ways to support safe and appropriate patient discharge when acute in-patient hospital care was no longer needed. The team played a vital role in supporting the efforts by bringing forward innovative solutions and resources to meet the needs of the community. A process was developed to discharge COVID-19 patients who no longer needed acute care resources of an in-patient hospital to a Peak View location, creating a dedicated space to serve the behavioral and physical health needs of COVID-19 positive patients. An entire ward to serve patients with COVID-19 was quickly mobilized. Taline worked closely with epidemiologists and the Public Health Medical Director on quarantine and isolation protocols that would facilitate the discharge of patients from acute care settings to Peak View. The Peak View team has repeatedly shown their dedication and passion to promote and protect community health. DeAnn stated it was a pleasure to honor Taline and the Peak View team as Public Health Champions.

Taline Meredith and Mary Ann Morrelli with Peak View thanked Public Health for the honor and look forward to continued collaborations.

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

Dr. Terbush entertained a motion to approve the January 2022 Board of Health Meeting minutes.

**MOVED:** by Kari Kilroy, seconded by Councilmember Donelson to ratify the minutes from the January 2022 Board of Health meeting.

**MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.**

### **Finance and Budget**

Samantha Montmeny, Finance Supervisor, presented the December 2021 preliminary financial summary. Revenues and Expenditures are both down. Personnel is underspent, which is presently occurring across the county. Overall, there is an expectation at this time that Fund Balance will be increased. No questions were presented.

Samantha presented two contracts up for vote. The first, El Paso County Public Health Provider Education and Outreach Regarding Sexually Transmitted Infections (STI), is a new contract totaling \$35,000 geared towards educating community providers with the objective of reducing STI rates.

**MOVED:** by Kari Kilroy, seconded by Ted Collas to approve the El Paso County Public Health Provider Education and Outreach Regarding Sexually Transmitted Infections (STI) Contract.

**MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The second contract for El Paso County Public Health STI Screening and Treatment was reviewed. This renewed contract utilizes a federally funded grant to increase screening and treatment to ultimately prevent infertility in individuals with STIs.

**MOVED:** by Councilmember Donelson, seconded by Ted Collas to approve El Paso County Public Health STI Screening and Treatment contract.

**MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.**

## **New Business**

DeAnn Ryberg discussed the new Board of Health email policy. A process has been set up where all incoming emails to [boardofhealth@elpasoco.com](mailto:boardofhealth@elpasoco.com) are being forwarded to all Board members. Additionally, a member of the Public Health team monitors the inbox and when questions pertain to programming or agendas arise, Public Health staff will work to respond to those emails while including language indicating the response is provided by Public Health staff rather than Board of Health. This new policy reflects discussions of processes with Board members to date and DeAnn welcomed questions or concerns. Dr. Terbush noted the Director's Report within the Board meeting packet contained a summary analysis of email topics received. DeAnn mentioned that summary will continue to be provided in the Director's Report for Board awareness.

Kari Kilroy stated concern regarding who would respond to messages. DeAnn stated that the policy will remain open to process improvements and staff members who will provide responses will make the Board aware that a response is being provided.

Dr. Terbush stated that individual Board members who have information on received messages should address the messages directly. He is pleased with the process and the responses provided by Public Health staff.

Dr. Kent Roberson, El Paso County community member, commented that he is grateful for the policy changes.

Commissioner Gonzalez thanked staff for the updates and Councilmember Donelson for drawing attention to the need for an improved process.

**MOVED:** by Councilmember Donelson, seconded by Kari Kilroy to approve the Board of Health email policy.  
**MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.**

## **Director's Report**

DeAnn Ryberg noted February 14 marked two full years of COVID-19 response for the El Paso County Public Health team. The team has worked tirelessly and DeAnn reflected on agency activities over this period. Over 1,560 media stories and approximately 200 news releases (compared to an average of 10 news releases per year in normal years prior to COVID-19) have been shared based on interviews and information. Social media presence has grown with an increase in followers across platforms. There have been 1,087,200 vaccine doses administered through our uniquely coordinated Vaccine Consortium and 1,716,401 tests have been administered.

As was mentioned earlier in the meeting, positive trends can be seen across all disease metrics. Public Health is actively engaged in strategies to transition to a more routine disease response model for COVID-19. The community currently has high levels of population immunity, we anticipate expanded access to treatments, and there is widespread availability of vaccines and prevention measures. Moving to the next phase of our COVID-19 response, we look to take on a broader spectrum of our core public health activities. Public Health will also be focusing on statutorily required efforts such as our Community Health Assessment (CHA) and Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP). DeAnn asked Dr. Urbina to provide further information on continuing prevention measures.

Dr. Urbina noted we have come a long way, and disease prevention measures remain effective in navigating the next phases. Vaccines and boosters continue to be important tools. The unvaccinated, or individuals who have not completed the recommended series of vaccines still reflect those who have more complications from infection. He stated mask wearing is still important as well as staying home when sick so infections do not

spread through workplaces. Treatments and therapeutics have helped people to survive COVID-19 and our healthcare systems have done tremendous work on this front. Washing hands and increasing ventilation and air flow are important. We continue to encourage individuals to make informed decisions based on their personal health and risk factors.

Fadi Youkhana, Epidemiologist, presented a data update indicating incidence levels in the county have continued to decline to approximately 118 cases per day. Hospitalizations have also decreased and the local hospital capacity dial has been reduced to green indicating normal capacities. Fadi thanked the regional hospitals for this daily information. January ended with more cases than October, November, and December combined with 7-10 more hospital admissions per day over prior months. Deaths remained somewhat consistent and did not rise proportionally to the increased number of cases. February has produced roughly 10 hospital admissions per day and less than one death per day. Though the data does lag, this is a very encouraging sign. Fadi indicated there will be some changes to the data dashboard to reflect some changes to response. The new landing page, or first data page seen when accessing the dashboard, will move to a summary detailing cases, hospitalizations and deaths and a case graph adjustable to user selected date ranges. Outbreak and locations pages are being removed from the dashboard, as this data loses resolution with the increase in at-home rapid tests and the data is less relevant than previously in the response. The team will continue to update the data daily during weekdays only and welcomes any changes or suggestions to the dashboards.

Councilmember Donelson asked Dr. Urbina if his comments regarding masks indicated there should be a policy change to recommending masks indoors. Dr. Urbina stated that he feels the recommendation is based on risk, but he does believe it is prudent for all individuals to wear masks indoors. He added it is likely that guidance on mask wearing will soon be changing. Councilmember Donelson asked Fadi if the change in the landing page for the data dashboard would indicate specific dates. Fadi stated the date slider to the left of the graph allows individuals to select preferred dates they wish to observe and the default date range begins March 2020 and ends at present. Councilmember Donelson suggested more recent data be highlighted in the default date range.

DeAnn suggested that the date range slider could be more clearly labeled to help individuals understand timeframes being observed.

Fadi suggested that in addition to presenting aggregate summary data, summary data for the last 14 days can be displayed to convey more recent information. The Board discussed this suggestion relative to the dashboard layout, noting the importance of cumulative data as well as conveyance of present circumstances. Dr. Urbina noted the visualization of the cumulative data demonstrates the community's role in the mitigation of infection.

Dr. Terbush emphasized the critical relationship between a patient and their physician and he asked Dr. Vu to comment on the way the data is presented as it relates to the patient/provider relationship. Dr. Vu stated it is important to know the current data versus the cumulative data over the last two years. He supports Fadi's suggestion to have both current and historic data present, with users having the ability to manipulate the timeframe. He feels interpretation is more important than the raw data itself and data has more value when patients and physicians discuss and understand the data's value.

Andrea Roberson, county resident, commented that viewing deaths as a percentage of overall deaths would be useful. Dr. Vu and Fadi confirmed that mortality data is available at the state level and the Data and Analytics Office will be looking at how that data can be utilized in the future.

Fadi presented a mockup of the proposed change to the landing page that was suggested. Dr. Vu recommended putting more recent data higher and larger on the page. Councilmember Donelson asked if the changes could be implemented in the next few days based on the Board's conversations and DeAnn confirmed they would.

DeAnn introduced Haley Zachary, Communicable Disease Program Manager, to describe school guidance updates that will be effective February 28. New guidance is well aligned to current county guidance. Reporting requirements from the schools will stay the same with schools being required to report cases and outbreaks of COVID-19. Isolation and quarantine guidance for household contacts will remain required. Exposure notifications will no longer be required for individual cases and case investigation and contact tracing will be Public Health's responsibility.

DeAnn recognized Haley and her team for their marvelous work. It is because of the hard work of the Communicable Disease epidemiologists, disease intervention specialists, and case investigators that such rich data can be shared with the community.

DeAnn introduced Meghan Haynes, Public Health Planner, to discuss the community health assessment (CHA) and community health improvement plan (CHIP) updates. Meghan shared that at heart of the CHA and the CHIP is the Healthy Community Collaborative (HCC) stakeholder group who has been working together since 2011 to implement strategies identified in the CHIP. It is a multi-sector collaborative inclusive of schools, hospitals, health systems, non-profit organizations, city and county government agencies, public health, medical providers, and interested citizens. The HCC monitors its collective progress through the Thriving Colorado dashboard. The CHA is required every five years by the Colorado Public Health Act of 2008 (SB 08-194) and is required for accreditation by the Public Health Accreditation Board (PHAB). The CHA forms the basis for the CHIP and is framed around the Colorado Health Equity Model. This model was chosen by the HCC steering committee to ensure there is thoughtful and intentional review of the data on the factors that contribute to the health of the community.

Kari Kilroy asked what previous model had been used. Meghan stated the previous model was framed around Colorado's 10 Winnable Battles. Many of the same behaviors and conditions will continue to be tracked, but will include more details around the Social Determinants of Health.

The CHIP, like the CHA, is required every five years as well. The CHIP is designed to track implementation of strategies and revise them over time if needed. The current plan takes us through the remainder of 2022 with two goals: addressing mental health and substance use and improving healthy eating and active living. Meghan stated we are actively engaged in updating the CHA to inform the next CHIP. There are eight phases to the process and the team is currently in phase three of conducting a community health assessment. The Data and Analytics team compiles data, sharing it at monthly meetings, and is an integral part of the process. The information is used to find alignment with community partners. Hospitals are on a 3-year cycle and we are hoping to find strategic alignment in the next cycle. Meghan has worked closely with partners such as Centura Health for intentional data sharing to align reporting on similar indicators and to support one another in these processes. Meghan looks forward to bringing the CHA and the CHIP to the Board at a future meeting to share the established priorities that will be addressed in the next five years.

Councilmember Donelson asked what goes into a Community Health Assessment. Meghan stated a large portion of the assessment looks at population health indicators. The Colorado Health Equity model will focus the assessment on indicators pertinent to economic opportunity, physical environment, built environment, health behaviors and conditions, mental health, access, utilization, and quality of care in our community. Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE) provides some of those data indicators. The Office of Data and Analytics also looks at available indicators and references secondary data resources to provide content. Public Health is also exploring an opportunity for primary qualitative data collection due to COVID-19 funding that has been received. Meghan clarified both qualitative and quantitative data aspects are included in the assessment.

DeAnn concluded the Director's Report and thanked Jared Verner and Christian Wright for their technical support during the meeting.

Dr. Terbush reiterated thanks to the Public Health Champions for their collaborations and asked if there were any final comments from members of the Board or public.

Dr. Kent Roberson, county resident, asked the board to consider a statement regarding the value of natural immunity.

Andrea Roberson, county resident, commented death rates are up over 40% according to insurance companies and stated the vaccines might be causing lower immune response and an increase in cancers. She suggested questioning beliefs.

Dr. Terbush asked that Board members provide feedback on the meeting venue to Deputy Director DeAnn Ryberg.

Adjournment at 10:42 am.

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

The next Board of Health meeting will be:

**Wednesday, March 23, 2022 8:30 a.m. - 10:30 a.m.**, located at The Citizens Service Center, 1675 W. Garden of the Gods Rd. in Colorado Springs.

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