

**EL PASO COUNTY PUBLIC HEALTH**

**March 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 March 23, 2022. Six Board of Health members were physically present and two were excused as absent.

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

**Board of Health Member Roll Call:**

*Present:*

- Dr. James Terbush, President
- Commissioner Cami Bremer
- Councilmember Dave Donelson
- Commissioner Longinos Gonzalez, Jr.
- Dr. Richard Vu
- Ted Collas

*Absent/Excused:*

- Doris Ralston, Vice President
- Kari Kilroy

**Directors Present:**

- Susan Wheelan, Public Health Director – in person
- Dr. Christopher Urbina, Interim Medical Director- in person
- Heather Graves, Community Health Promotion Director- in person
- Brenda Heimbach, Health Services Director- in person
- 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      | Lori Cleaton  | Nancy Fortuin     | Meghan Haynes | Amy Kalmus    |
| Darrell Kirby      | Jordan Linder | Samantha Montmeny | Lisa Powell   | Mary Ritchie  |
| Melissa Seidenberg | Tom Strand    | Kelsey Tillema    | Nora Todd     | Fadi Youkhana |
| Haley Zachary      |               |                   |               |               |

Two American Sign Language Interpreters from Sign Language Network  
Members of the Pikes Peak Regional Office of Emergency Management (PPROEM): Capt. Mike Archuleta, John Cole, Bart Evans, David Husted, Lonnie Inzer, Caroline Joy, Lauren McCoy, Kyle Pierce, Brandi Porter, Jim Reid, Ted Sayer

**Approval of Agenda**

**MOVED:** by Ted Collas, seconded by Councilmember Donelson to approve the agenda for the March 23, 2022 Board of Health meeting.

**MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY**

## **Board of Health Comments**

Dr. Terbush welcomed Director Susan Wheelan back from recent leave and noted the Pikes Peak Regional Office of Emergency Management (PPROEM) was present for recognition at today's meeting. He stated Dr. Urbina would be presenting today on illegal fentanyl use which is a critical topic of discussion.

Councilmember Donelson stated that the City Council takes the fentanyl crisis very seriously and hopes state legislation reducing the possession of up to four grams of fentanyl to a misdemeanor is corrected. He also thanked Susan Wheelan and Public Health members for attending the Colorado Springs City Council meeting in which the Council recognized April 4 through April 10 as National Public Health Week.

Dr. Terbush read into record that [Resolution 2021-11](#) passed in December of 2021 indicates a schedule of 2022 meetings. Item 4 of the resolution states that all regular meetings will be held in the John Snow Conference Room in the Citizens Service Center unless otherwise announced. As meetings are being moved to the first floor of the Citizens Service Center to accommodate attendees and increase accessibility, the resolution will be updated to reflect the new meeting locations. The new resolution will be presented to the Board for a formal vote at April's meeting. All meetings for 2022 will be held in room 1017 of the Citizens Service Center unless otherwise announced with exception of June and October. Meetings those months will be in room 1019.

Dr. Terbush welcomed county citizens and elected officials Nancy Fortuin, Councilmember for Manitou Springs and Tom Strand, Councilmember for Colorado Springs to the meeting.

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

No comments presented.

## **Public Health Champion Awards**

Director Wheelan introduced Jim Reid, Director of PPROEM, and the PPROEM team. This team is made up of dedicated partners who have provided invaluable support to El Paso County Public Health (EPCPH) and other agencies over the last two years of COVID-19 pandemic response. The region utilized an innovative approach to the pandemic in forming a Unified Command Structure between EPCPH and PPROEM. Pairing the tactical and operational emergency management principles of PPROEM with the subject matter expertise and technical knowledge of Public Health has led to an increased ability to respond to the evolving needs of the pandemic. PPROEM provided support for: staffing critical emergency coordination roles, center structure, mobilization of vaccination and testing sites, set up and operationalization of the homeless isolation shelter, set up of the Broadmoor World Arena mass vaccination site, staffing the regional Joint Information Center, financial reconciliation with federal grants, procuring and distributing personal protective equipment (PPE), volunteer and staffing coordination of vaccine points of dispensing with community emergency response teams, centralized scheduling for seniors in the early phases of vaccine distribution, scheduling coordination for Operation House Call for homebound individuals, and rotation staffing for weekends and after-hours to give Public Health staff a reprieve from 24 hour a day, 7 day a week response. They accomplished this while balancing all other emergency needs and regional emergency readiness across the county. Public Health does not function to its optimum levels without the expertise and support of PPROEM.

Jim Reid thanked Director Wheelan and noted that the team remains active and stands by Public Health. He thanked the Board of Health for their leadership and has appreciated working with the Public Health team who worked hard with calmness, empathy, and professionalism during difficult times. The lives impacted and saved

have been significant and this is an accomplishment that not all realize. He hopes future collaborations can continue to be built between the agencies.

Commissioner Bremer stated while many comments have focused on the PPROEM COVID-19 response, she recognizes the team has ensured the county is ready for so many other potential incidents. She stated that during the Marshall wildfire in Boulder County in December, she was impressed how the team balanced current obligations while assisting with the logistics of fire evacuations from nursing homes and long-term care facilities. She appreciates the breadth of the team's multi-tasking abilities and the long-term partnership between EPCPH and PPROEM.

### **Approval of Minutes**

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

**MOVED:** by Ted Collas, seconded by Commissioner Gonzalez to ratify the minutes from the February 2022 Board of Health meeting.

**MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.**

### **Finance and Budget**

Samantha Montmeny, Financial Services Budget Supervisor, provided the February 2022 financial summary. Revenue reflected as under budget is as expected at this time. Finance has no concerns.

Dr. Vu asked why expenditures were under budget. Samantha stated it is largely due to staffing, as the agency is understaffed with 193 of 228 authorized FTEs.

**MOVED:** by Commissioner Gonzalez, seconded by Councilmember Donelson to approve the financial summary.

**MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.**

### **New Business**

Dr. Terbush read into record the [Proclamation of the El Paso County Board of Health Recognizing National Public Health Week 2022](#).

**MOVED:** by Commissioner Bremer, seconded by Councilmember Donelson to approve the Proclamation.

**MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.**

### **Director's Report**

Director Wheelan thanked Councilmember Donelson for promoting Public Health recognition with the Colorado Springs City Council. Public Health team members were present at a City Council meeting including leaders from EPCPH's Community Health Promotion, Environmental Health, and Vital Statistics divisions to highlight important Public Health services within the county. She shared that the elected officials and the community recognize, appreciate, and support the work of Public Health staff.

Director Wheelan stated Public Health works with a Healthy Community Collaborative (HCC), consisting of over 60 different organizations and individuals, to identify what will be collectively worked on within the community in a Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP). That plan highlights current priorities of

substance use, mental health, healthy eating, and active living. With regard to substance use issues, Director Wheelan introduced Dr. Urbina to share information regarding fentanyl and opioid use.

Dr. Urbina, Interim Medical Director, stated that he and Heather Graves, Community Health Promotion Division Director, would share information regarding problems with opioids which are not new, but rather fluctuate in waves. He stated that there are many opioids in our environment: natural, semi-synthetic, and synthetic (which are of most recent concern). These substances all function in the same way- acting on receptors to control pain and activating a reward center in our brains, so as opioids ease pain they also provide a sense of euphoria. Dependency begins after approximately five to seven days.

Fentanyl is typically prescribed to control severe pain and is frequently used in hospice circumstances. It is 50-100 times more potent than morphine. Fentanyl is often added in combination with other opioids or mixed with methamphetamines, cocaine, and other drugs on the street. Several high-profile cases have occurred where individuals were unaware that Percocet or cocaine were laced with fentanyl, which has led to respiratory depression and death.

Councilmember Donelson asked what the purpose was in the lacing. Dr. Urbina stated that the substance is inexpensive, creates greater dependency, and provides a slightly higher euphoric side effect. This new dependency creation benefits sellers by increasing user base. Councilmember Donelson asked if someone unaware can quickly overdose. Dr. Urbina stated even some who are frequent users can overdose depending on concentration of the dose.

Commissioner Bremer clarified the issue is not with medications, such as Percocet, legally and properly received through a pharmacy. Dr. Urbina confirmed this and stated the issue with fentanyl lacing pertains to street drugs. Narcotics create respiratory depression and fentanyl requires two to three times the normal dosing of Narcan to treat that effect. While recent interventions and regulations have reduced the numbers of prescriptions written, there remain many opioid addicted individuals who are seeking street drugs. There is an appropriate, adherent level of narcotic use when medicines are prescribed. Issues arise when dependency leads to substance misuse.

Dr. Urbina shared there were 5,447 drug-related overdose deaths in Colorado between 2016 and 2020. Of those, 751 occurred in El Paso County and 92 of those were due to synthetic opioids including fentanyl. Survival of an overdose also impacts healthcare systems as there were nearly 3,000 hospital admissions due to opioid overdoses in El Paso County over this same timeframe.

Commissioner Bremer stated that at some point she would like to understand the variations between age groups. She would like to know how issues are being addressed in the 60 and over communities as the reasons for overdoses would differ than for younger populations. Dr. Urbina agreed he would like to discuss this on a county level, as the interventions do vary between age groups.

Sharing data on age-adjusted rates of drug overdose deaths due to synthetic opioids, Dr. Urbina highlighted differences in the numbers based on race and ethnicity.

Dr. Urbina stated Coroner's Office data indicates there were four accidental fentanyl deaths in El Paso County in 2016 where in 2021 that number is up to 102. Age ranges were 1-67. He stated a comprehensive strategy is needed involving Public Health and broad community support. Education and awareness of the dangers of fentanyl must be shared as it is estimated one of every four street drugs is laced with fentanyl. Recognition of a use disorder and enrollment in early treatment is imperative.

Heather Graves outlined existing EPCPH efforts regarding substance use prevention. The Community Health Promotion (CHP) Division is recruiting a Behavioral Health Planner who will assess and evaluate the community's behavioral health resources and determine what is needed to close gaps in this area. The Fountain Valley Communities That Care model has recently received a Drug-Free Communities grant. This is a prevention model that promotes healthy youth development and prevents youth substance use by increasing protective factors and reducing risk. She stated the Child Fatality Review Team, a multi-sector group with law enforcement, health care providers, Department of Human Services, schools, and Public Health, reviews child fatalities within the county. The team reviews cases and looks for areas of prevention to minimize future deaths. EPCPH's CHP division is also involved with a multi-sector Behavioral Health Steering Committee where substance use disorders, substance abuse, and mental health in El Paso County are key focus areas.

Director Wheelan stated that in 2016 there was significant concern regarding teen suicides in El Paso County and many leaders were convened at that time to address this issue. During that time, youth suicide and youth substance abuse emerged as the top two areas prioritized for resources. Substance use and suicide utilize similar models for prevention. The group pursued funding sources and secured grants, hiring a Teen Suicide Prevention Planner, and worked with the County Commissioners to sustain funding for those efforts. Director Wheelan stated the Behavioral Health Planner will follow the same model as the Teen Suicide Prevention Planner and focus resources on these issues. Time and resources must be invested across the community to make progress in prevention efforts.

Dr. Vu asked if Narcan is available as an Over the Counter (OTC) medication or if it requires prescription. Dr. Urbina stated it is available OTC. Dr. Vu stated that he thinks it is a benefit to have it widely available, however the opportunity of face-to-face education between the person carrying the medication and a clinician is missed. The other risk is that people may not understand the short acting nature of Narcan when compared to the long-lasting effects of an opiate. While Narcan quickly effects uptake of the opioid, a user might not call for emergency assistance needed to sustain care. Dr. Urbina stated when EMS personnel are trained, they are taught to continually monitor the individual closely. He is in agreement that Narcan must be linked to additional medical care.

Councilmember Donelson asked if the route of OTC Narcan delivery was nasal or an injection. Dr. Urbina confirmed the dose is nasal.

Commissioner Gonzalez appreciated the information presented as this issue has been of significant concern over the last couple of years. He concurred that addicted individuals need to be provided the help they need and also people that are pushing the drug must be held accountable. He stated the need for reversal of legislation that categorized fentanyl possession as a misdemeanor rather than a felony.

Dr. Terbush stated that this topic is a priority for our county and the state of Colorado. As Public Health looks upstream for causes and solutions, he thinks addressing the precursor chemicals at higher levels is also critical.

Commissioner Bremer stated safe disposal of medications must also be managed. Heather announced a drug take-back day in Fountain on April 30<sup>th</sup>. With regard to ongoing efforts to ensure there is always a safe place to dispose of unused medication, hospitals previously engaged in that process. Heather and her team are exploring options currently available. She also shared that part of the Fountain take-back day includes education on preventing access to drugs from those who should not have it.

Director Wheelan added that the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE) website contains an interactive map specifying locations of disposal for those who wish to properly dispose of prescription medications. She stated a link will be provided on Public Health's website as well.

Darrell Kirby, Emergency Preparedness and Response Coordinator, and Dr. Urbina presented on COVID-19 response updates. Dr. Urbina stated there are positive trends across all COVID-19 metrics at this time and there is currently high community immunity to the illness; however, prevention measures remain important. He encouraged individuals who have not been vaccinated to receive the vaccine, get boosted, and consider wearing a mask indoors, specifically if in a high-risk group. He stated that at state and federal levels there is a transition to address COVID-19 through routine disease response and as we continue to observe data and share updates, the county will be transitioning similarly.

Darrell Kirby stated the Chapel Hills and Citadel vaccination sites will cease operations on March 31, as will the testing site in Falcon. As of March 31, the testing site in Fountain will transition from performing onsite tests to occasionally distributing home test kits. The Chapel Hill and Citadel testing sites will continue onsite testing for the time being but are anticipated to close in the near future. Starting in early March, Public Health has directly distributed at-home tests, targeting the high-risk populations and those who require access support. Multiple community partners have assisted in the rapid test distributions as well.

Councilmember Donelson asked how many hospitalizations there have been for COVID-19 in the last seven days. Fadi Youkhana, Epidemiologist, stated that data is lagging presently due to a CDPHE data systems issue, but the dashboards should be current in the next few days. Councilmember Donelson asked what contact tracing operations were presently taking place. Haley Zachary stated patterns are changing, however the team is continuing with COVID-19 contact tracing and investigations as they await further guidance. Director Wheelan stated we are reliant on the state guidance to plan for the staffing. Many of Communicable Disease (CD) staff have been working on COVID-19 exclusively and will need to be trained to do other CD work, but at this time it is unclear when COVID-19 contact tracing will no longer be required.

Dr. Vu commented that his practice still sees influenza patients and still recommends individuals receive their vaccines. He asked if there would be potential for home influenza antigen testing in the future, like COVID-19 home testing. Dr. Urbina stated the challenge with home tests for influenza is the expense. The federal government devoted a significant amount of money for the COVID-19 home antigen tests which we now have in significant quantity. He thinks Public Health's future role is to continue to promote flu vaccination.

Director Wheelan stated while keeping an eye on COVID-19, much of what has been done to operationally scale up for response will be scaling down in 2022, as indicated by the changes in testing and vaccination sites. With pandemic response efforts, the death metric is often an indicator of how the response went and when adjusted for total deaths per 100,000 individuals, our county ranks 5<sup>th</sup> among the most populated counties with 231 deaths per 100,000 people. The community responded to administer 1,098,200 total vaccine doses, vaccinating 489,000 individuals (73% of the population), with 436,600 fully vaccinated. Director Wheelan stated the agency will continue to evaluate the data and EPCPH's COVID-19 response and will present additional findings at a later time.

Dr. Terbush entertained a motion to adjourn.

**MOVED:** by Councilmember Donelson, seconded by Ted Collas to adjourn.

**MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.**

Adjournment at 10:19 am.

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

The next Board of Health meeting will be:

**Wednesday, April 27, 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.

