

EL PASO COUNTY PUBLIC HEALTH

August 25, 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 August 25, 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 – in person
Commissioner Longinos Gonzalez, Jr. – in person
Kari Kilroy – Teams
Dr. Richard Vu- in person

Directors Present:

Susan Wheelan, Director – in person
DeAnn Ryberg, Deputy Director – in person
Dr. Robin Johnson- in person
Brenda Heimbach, Health Services Division Director- Teams
Michelle Hewitt, Public Health Information Officer- in person
Jared Verner, Deputy Public Health Information Officer- in person

Others Present at Regular Session:

Vicki Bennett	Barb Bridgemon	Ashley Busch	Lori Cleaton
Stephen Goodwin	Meghan Haynes	Diana May	Samantha Montmeny
Lisa Powell	Mary Ritchie	Melissa Seidenberg	Nikki Simmons
Summer South	Fadi Youkhana	Haley Zachary	

Members of EIS (Emergency Incident Support) Team
Two American Sign Language Interpreters from Sign Language Network

Present for Public Commentary: Adrianna Card, Kristin Greiner, M.G. Peterson, Marion Hourdequin, Kara Mae Coffey, Jason Jorgenson

Board Member Roll Call

See above

Approval of Agenda

Dr. Jim Terbush asked for approval of the agenda.

MOVED: by Doris Ralston seconded by Councilmember Sam Gieck to approve the agenda for the August 25, 2021 meeting.

MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

Board of Health Comments:

Dr. Terbush welcomed Colorado Springs City Councilmember and new Board of Health member, Dave Donelson, a Colorado Springs resident for 31 years and former Army Special Forces Medic and Physician's Assistant. He has a background in Preventive Medicine and Trauma. He represents District 1 and looks forward to bringing his unique perspective to the Board of Health.

Dr. Terbush read a statement from the El Paso County Attorney's office stating we understand many in the community are very passionate in their beliefs about the risks of COVID-19, masks, and vaccinations. While the El Paso County Board of Health appreciates and respects these opinions, we expect members of the public to be respectful in discussing their beliefs and to be respectful to each other, El Paso County Public Health staff, and this Board. We will not tolerate threatening or harassing behavior. Each speaker who chooses to speak during the Public Comment portion of the meeting will be limited to 2 minutes. They will need to identify themselves, who they are associated with (if they are with an organization) and the name of their home county, if not El Paso County.

Approval of Board of Health Minutes

Dr. Terbush asked for approval of the June 2021 Board Meeting minutes.

MOVED: by Ted Collas, seconded by Commissioner Gonzalez to ratify the minutes from the June 2021 Board of Health meeting.

MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

Finance and Budget

Lori Cleaton, County Budget Manager, provided the July 2021 Financial Report. The revenue trend is consistent with past reports. Revenue assets continue to be lower due to resources focused on COVID-19 response, though there has been some improvement. There are no concerns for revenue as additional funding is covering COVID-19 response costs and overall needs. Expenditures note significant underspending in both Personnel and Operating presently. The net impact indicating revenues over expenditures has come down since the last report due to timing in receipt of revenues, but we anticipate that to move to a more positive position by the August reports. Overall, things appear as expected.

RESOLUTION:

Lori Cleaton presented to the Board a Resolution to Recognize Revenue in the Amount of \$2,567,956 and Appropriate Expenditures in the Amount of \$3,418,398 for Epidemiology and Laboratory Capacity (ELC) Grants. This recognizes the remainder of the round one funding from earlier in 2021 as well as a portion of the \$12MM that has been received for round two. The remainder of the round two funding will extend and be utilized in the 2022 budget.

Dr. Terbush read the Resolution to Recognize Revenue in the Amount of \$2,567,956 and Appropriate Expenditures in the Amount of \$3,418,398 as Contracted with the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE) into the record and asked for comments or discussion.

Director Wheelan stated that when the first case of COVID-19 was diagnosed in March of 2020, the El Paso County Public Health team had only a handful of Communicable Disease staff. This grant has helped bring Public Health up to much needed staffing levels. As the response will continue to be a long-term effort, she appreciates how this grant will assist in keeping the team members in place to ensure supportive resources for what is now Colorado's most populous county according to Census. These resources will be put to good use for effective disease control.

Councilmember Donelson asked for clarification on the dollar figures.

Lori explained that round two of ELC funding provided \$5,100,000. A portion of that was added to the 2020 budget and later moved to 2021. A majority of the funding being recognized through this resolution is what remains of the original \$5,100,000 funding. An additional \$12,000,000 has been received in round two of the ELC Grant, and approximately \$500,000 of that is being appropriated at this time. The remaining amount will be moved into 2022 and 2023.

Dr. Terbush stated as the ELC Grant funding extends over a number of years, it will allow us to hire staff to support disease control. Many of the shortened timeframe grants do not.

Director Wheelan stated she is thankful for the expertise of the Budget and Finance office as over 70% of Public Health is funded through grants, many of which require management of differing timelines and requirements. The shortened timelines of some grants can make it a challenge to hire and train new resources, so the extension of this grant is very important for our ability to acquire and maintain resources to reinforce health protection of our community.

MOVED: by Councilmember Sam Gieck, seconded by Commissioner Cami Bremer to accept Resolution to Recognize Revenue and Appropriate Expenditures for Contract Funding.

MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

Lori welcomed Samantha Montmeney to the team supporting Public Health. She holds the role of Health and Human Services Supervisor and will be participating in future meetings.

New Business

Dr. Terbush stated that September is National Suicide Prevention Awareness month and read into the record a [Proclamation of the El Paso County Board of Health Recognizing National Suicide Prevention Awareness Month 2021](#).

Dr. Terbush commented that it wasn't long ago that El Paso County was noted to have a particularly high youth suicide rate. This issue was very impactful to the community. Partnerships between Public Health and the community fueled change in both attitude and action to make a difference on this very important topic. He supports the proclamation and is pleased to make this proclamation.

Susan acknowledged that the Board of County Commissioners provided additional funds through Critical Needs to support the Youth Suicide Prevention Planner and Youth Health and Development Planner. In conjunction with grants pursued by the Child Fatality Review Team, which reviews cases of preventable deaths of those aged 17 and younger, the momentum of the Youth Suicide Prevention Team has been developed and maintained. The role of Public Health is to maintain staff that is knowledgeable about prevention and strategies

to collaborate effectively with community partners. She appreciates the priority placed on this effort by the Board of Health as well as the Board of County Commissioners. This is an effort that requires continued focus. She invited the Board of Health members and Public Health team to participate in a walk being held by NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness) on October 9th. Public Health collaborates routinely with NAMI and she expressed the desire to see a Public Health presence at the event in support of mental health, and wellbeing.

Commissioner Bremer noted the quantified goal in the proclamation to reduce suicide deaths in El Paso County by 20% by 2024 and requested incremental updates on progress towards that goal. She stated that she and Commissioner Gonzalez are honored to be sponsoring these actions as members of the Board of County Commissioners.

Director Wheelan recounted in 2014 Colorado Springs was put on the map with Palo Alto, CA and Fairfax, VA as having high incident rates of teen suicide. Many organizations have worked with Public Health on prevention efforts over the years and progress has been made. Tracking progress towards goal is readily available.

Commissioner Gonzalez shared that this issue was being addressed during his first year on the Board of Health. He acknowledged the strong progress made over the years but noted a slight increase in numbers last year. He asked if there is a way to identify if the increase seen last year was COVID-19 related or a general overall trend. Separating COVID-19 related circumstances from generally increased tendencies could help to better address the situation.

Director Wheelan stated the presentation to the Board of County Commissioners could be more in-depth and address more of the complex aspects.

MOVED: by Ted Collas, seconded by Councilmember Sam Gieck to approve the Proclamation Recognizing National Suicide Prevention Awareness Month 2021.

MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

Dr. Terbush stated the Employment Agreement for Public Health Director is being presented for approval this month and he introduced Mary Ritchie, Assistant County Attorney, to speak to the highlights.

Mary Ritchie confirmed that per Colorado Revised Statute 25-1-508 the Board of Health has the power to contract with a person qualified to be Public Health Director. Per Board of Health Resolution 2021-06 approved on June 23, 2021, Susan Wheelan meets and exceeds these requirements, as the Board of Health has found her performance to be exceptional. The Attorney's Office did prepare the Employment Agreement draft, consistent with other contracts within the County. Of note, there are some blanks in the contract with regards to accrued sick leave, vacation, and personal time. Mary guided the Board to fill in those values with Director Wheelan's accrued values: 1440 hours of sick leave, 286.93 hours of vacation time, and 8 hours personal time. There were no further changes to the proposed contract document.

MOVED: by Councilmember Sam Gieck, seconded by Commissioner Longinos Gonzalez, Jr. to approve the Employment Agreement for Public Health Director.

MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

Director's Report

Stephen Goodwin, Public Health's Chief Scientific Data Strategist, noted after a decrease in COVID-19 incidence leading into July, from about 96 cases/day, we saw an increase by about 200%, to about 193 cases/day. This is consistent with other counties in the state of Colorado. In the summer of 2020, cases within our county peaked at 87 cases a day. Therefore, in July our rates were higher than in the summer of 2020. El Paso County no longer has the highest incidence among the top 10 most populated counties in Colorado. It now has the fifth highest incidence among those counties. 9 out of 10 hospitalizations are of unvaccinated (not fully vaccinated) individuals -- most hospitalizations appear preventable with vaccinations. Stephen presented a graph of cases, noting the peaks or case surges from Spring of 2020 to date. A hospital census graph was shared detailing COVID-19 related inpatients in our regional hospitals starting June 1, 2021 and combination of length of stay and daily admissions information. Though cases have not reached levels of the March peak, hospitalization admissions and census are approaching the peak, which indicates consistent cases are spawning hospitalizations and inflating the census.

Commissioner Gonzalez asked if the hospitalizations reported are proportionally the same as in the past with those that are admitted mostly county residents or are more out of county or out of state residents. No answer at this time; however, we are approaching the same level in admissions as we saw in the spring peak, so we would expect the census to behave similarly. Dr. Johnson stated that the hospitals behave as a system. They have contracts with other hospitals out of state to provide specialized services when needed. If there is pressure on the system, hospitals are triaging instances so one hospital can be bypassed for another to best meet the needs of patients and hospitals within the system. This might lead to variation in resident versus non-resident admissions.

Councilmember Donelson asked if criteria for hospital admission has changed from what it had been previously. Dr. Johnson stated she does not believe admission criteria has changed. Dr. Vu believes there are more outpatient therapies available now so some patients previously admitted might receive different treatment. Dr. Johnson and Stephen confirmed that lessons learned for managing cases through outpatient treatments have been incorporated since the October to January timeframe.

Commissioner Bremer asked how hospital census overlays with hospital ICU capacity. Dr. Johnson stated that the hospitals expand to meet the call, however there are increasing pressures with numbers of patient beds required and expansions to bring in the right services. Beds might not be traditional ICU care beds, but adjustments will be made to bring the proper services where needed and staffing is likely going to be an emerging issue as there is a decline in nursing providers after last year.

Director Wheelan added that Dr. Johnson has initiated and developed a clinical operations groups that meets routinely with UHealth, Penrose-St.Francis, Children's Hospital, and Mathews-Vu. Dr. Johnson maintains close contact with local Medical Directors on current and emerging issues. At the next Board Meeting, we will be presenting about the upcoming respiratory illness season as it relates to COVID-19. As illnesses begin to overlay one another, staffing is at the critical point. We will look to our continued disease prevention measures to help support medical staff.

Dr. Terbush noted the significant community hospital relationships Dr. Johnson has been integral in developing. He thanked her for her experience and expertise in building these important collaborative partnerships. Dr. Johnson commented that it is a privilege to work with the medical partners from the perspective of Public Health.

Ted Collas heard hospital admissions were increasing for younger age groups and asked if we were tracking that data. Stephen confirmed that point noting that data is collected. As older individuals have been vaccinated, the average age of those hospitalized is trending lower.

Stephen stated this 5th wave is largely driven by the Delta variant. There is less social distancing and less masking, but more vaccinations as well. Stephen's sense in consideration of the variant across the United States is that we are doing relatively well.

Stephen discussed a graph showing the ten most populated counties in the state comparing vaccinations vs 7-day incidence rates, inclusive of federal data. El Paso County is almost 59% fully vaccinated, which puts us 3rd in population group, we are 5th though in incidence rate. Generally, the larger the percentage of population vaccinated, the lower the incidence.

Dr. Vu asked if Stephen had any comment regarding Pueblo and why it demonstrates a lower incidence level despite lower vaccination rates. Stephen stated that Pueblo is an anomaly, and the reason is unknown.

Dr. Vu asked if we can separate out what type of vaccine individuals received in the data. Stephen said we do not split the information in that way at this time.

Councilmember Donelson asked why El Paso County with its vaccination rate of 58.8% has a lower incidence rate than Douglas, Larimer, and Adams Counties that have higher vaccination rates. No answer, however population immunity is a product of all immunity. That is, this chart details vaccination rates vs incidence, but natural infection immunity is not captured in the data set.

Councilmember Donelson asked if it is possible the Delta variant breaks through the vaccine at a higher rate than previous varieties. The Delta variant is much more transmissible, and though infections are milder after vaccination, individuals who are vaccinated can still become infected. Dr. Johnson reinforced that the continued layering of distancing, masks, and hand washing with vaccination is going to be essential.

Commissioner Bremer asked if we were tracking breakthrough cases. Stephen stated initially the CDC decided not to track that data with exception to hospitalizations and deaths, however we are starting to see better data around that from CDPHE. We expect to see an increase in breakthrough cases in the presence of the Delta variant, but do not have good data on that as of now.

Doris Ralston stated with the Department of Defense mandating vaccines, we might see a change in our community. Stephen validated this statement, adding that, with the FDA approval of the vaccines, we will likely see an increase in mandates.

Stephen displayed an age demographic slide which detailed case numbers across age groups for May, June, July, and August. The August data is just a portion of the month, but the surge is evident. The age groups most significantly acquiring disease are ages 20-49 likely because they are the most actively circulating in the community. Youth and individuals over 50 are underrepresented compared to relative population levels. The average age of hospitalization continues to decrease.

Councilmember Donelson asked if there were co-morbidities among the hospitalized and inquired about average stay for COVID patients. Dr. Johnson explained that co-morbidities increase the risk for hospitalizations. Stay is often 10 days to 2 weeks, but if admitted to ICU, can last potentially months.

Director Wheelan requested that Stephen take a quick look at the current COVID-19 data dashboard to understand hospital admissions by age group.

Stephen explained that the Delta variant is the largest represented variant in our region as indicated by sequencing of test samples at the state level. This is a concern as this variant is radically more transmissible than its predecessors. This causes the unvaccinated to be at special risk. Immunity from infection decreases over time

therefore breakthrough infections are also possible, and undermeasured. Breakthrough individuals who are vaccinated might also be infectious. Dr. Johnson stated that the Delta variant is more infectious because droplets contain a higher load of virus. Previous mutations did not have that viral load, which is why we are asking even vaccinated people to put masks back on when in enclosed spaces. Stephen stated that the viral load is at 2-3 times the concentration of previous variants.

The community approach to address the variant is the layered preventive approach. We know the vaccine is our strongest tool, but it is not our only tool. We must engage our additional practices of staying home when sick, using face coverings, social distancing, continued testing, case investigation, contact tracing, quarantining and isolation. We are asking the public to join us in layering protections.

Dr. Johnson discussed the vaccination activity from its initial point of release and phased dispensation. At this point we know that millions of individuals have been safely vaccinated. This week the FDA has approved the Pfizer vaccine, now named Comirnaty. The FDA approval process is rigorous and we should be able to rest in the safety of the vaccines. We don't know anyone who has Polio, and that is largely due to vaccinations. There is still steady vaccine uptake, and need to encourage people to take advantage of this protective tool. Dr. Johnson discussed the reasons to vaccinate as vaccination prevents hospitalizations and fatalities, breakthrough cases are shorter and milder, it reduces spread to others, it prevents opportunities for new variants to emerge, it is safe and effective, and it is more protective and durable than natural immunity.

As we further understand immune response to the vaccines, we are seeing there is waning of immunity at eight months past full vaccination. Boosters are approved for the immunocompromised at the eight-month mark and we expect to see that expanded to the public by early September.

Councilmember Sam Gieck asked if people were called in initially for vaccines would they be called again for boosters or should individuals pursue that on their own. Dr. Johnson said the processes are being developed, but we are also asking the public to pull out their cards and at the eight month mark they can call to ask their provider about a booster vaccine. Kari Kilroy offered to look into this as we find out more about the booster process.

Commissioner Bremer asked if we have information on the efficacy and impacts of crossing over to different vaccine manufacturers. Stephen said other countries did initiate that strategy. In the U.S. our strategy was to complete the doses on time. There are studies in play to see if crossing vaccines provides superior response. Dr. Johnson stated that we have not seen any data on that and as we look at boosters we will have more recommendations.

Dr. Johnson indicated we will be working in conjunction with the state to address more vulnerable populations to get booster vaccinations distributed. Consideration will need to be those connected to Operation House Call. Matthews Vu and Peak Vista already have questions about how we can help address boosters. We anticipate a lot of coordination and communication will be necessary among providers and locations. We are working with schools, churches, and other agencies who would like to bring in mobile options as well.

Doris Ralston asked about influenza vaccines as related to boosters as well as incidences of other respiratory illnesses. Dr Johnson stated that the preventive measures for COVID are the preventive measures for other respiratory viruses. We will be seeing future information at the next Board of Health about the overlay. Flu vaccines will be promoted. It is not being released early. It is safe to get the vaccines for the flu and COVID-19 together, but reasonable to be timed separately for comfort.

Councilmember Donelson stated there has been discussions of cases and hospitalizations and asked if the topic of COVID-19 deaths have been covered. Dr. Johnson confirmed that information continues to be available on Board of Health Meeting Minutes (August 25, 2021) - Page 7 of 9

the website. Death data has typically been lagged. We are seeing just about 1 death per day. The number of total deaths is over 900 for the County. He asked that if we tracked that data in the past as it rose, do we wish to track it as it declines.

Dr. Johnson stated that the fatality information is delayed as there is a process to the reporting. Stephen stated that the numbers are low at this time with vaccines protecting the more vulnerable populations. Councilmember Donelson stated though information on deaths may lag, it is good news that the rate of death is declining. Stephen stated that in the spring we had peaked to about two deaths per day, and now it is about one. During the fall pre-vaccination surge daily deaths were over 10.

DeAnn Ryberg provided a brief report on preparations to provide boosters when the general population becomes eligible, continuing with our approach of collaboration, partnership, and working with various sectors.

We have been in close coordination with our district superintendents, representatives from charter and private schools, and school nurses. The activities initiated during the last school year have continued over summer break and is continuing into the coming school year. Our school partnerships have performed with great leadership, and we are building on last year's work. The county has adopted CDPHE's school guidance and are following that locally. Public Health has eight dedicated school response personnel and are also recruiting to expand that team to meet the demands of the school year ahead.

Director Wheelan stated we are putting out a weekly children's and youth data brief for public and charter schools to maintain open lines of communication and transparent and highly localized data.

Stephen presented the hospital admission age for El Paso County month to month. Raw hospital admissions indicate high numbers in May for admissions, with ages skewing older. As time progresses, the age of individuals admitted is moving lower.

Director Wheelan re-emphasized the layered approach to protection against COVID-19 which has been promoted consistently. Protection provided by the vaccine is superior and the county holds many access points to acquire the vaccine. A recent study indicated that 3 out of 10 people were waiting for FDA approval prior to becoming vaccinated, so we expect there will be a bump in vaccinations with latest FDA approvals.

Dr. Terbush thanked Susan, DeAnn, Stephen, and Dr. Johnson for the presentations. He commended the team on the wonderful job in initiating the interface with the school districts and forging a good relationship with CDPHE, which has benefitted Public Health immensely.

Public Comment

Dr. Terbush indicated there were individuals present for Public Comments. He stated that the conversation today is not about vaccinations, and not about whether masks work- they do, as part of a layered preventive approach. He believes the question on the table is whether Public Health should mandate mask wearing in public schools. The mandate would apply to staff, students, and visitors alike. He feels that is what is in the public mind presently. An article in the Gazette indicates parents hold differing opinions on the topic of a mandate. Dr. Terbush stated 5 of 9 Board members received threatening calls, primarily from individuals purported to be in favor of mask mandates. Many Board members had their credentials questioned. He reiterated that threatening language to Board members or staff members will not be tolerated.

The following public comments were made, limited to two minutes each. Name, group representation, and El Paso County residency was requested to be shared prior to comments:

Adrianna Card is a resident of El Paso County and a mother of a kindergartener. She provided information on medical articles and details against mask mandates.

Kristin Greiner is an El Paso County resident with a first grader in District 20. She feels parents should have the right to choose for their children and spoke against mask mandates.

M.G. Peterson, El Paso County resident, reinforced previous public comments and commented against mask mandates.

Marion Hourdequin, a resident of El Paso County and mother of students, spoke in favor of mask mandates while incidence is high and while children under 12 are ineligible for vaccination.

Kara Mae Coffey, a parent of four children in El Paso County has worked on a petition for parent choice and spoke against mask mandates, preferring they be optional.

Jason Jorgenson, an El Paso County resident and member of the District 11 School Board, speaking on behalf of himself only, expressed appreciation for the children and youth data brief. He conveyed interest in local research, testing for antibodies in those naturally infected. He referenced a CDC study which stated student masking is not effective compared to staff masking.

Dr. Terbush noted the Public Comment portion is an important part on the meeting.

Commissioner Bremer thanked those who came for Public Comment. She noted it is an emotional topic and the professional decorum is greatly appreciated. She thanked attendees for their time and commended them for addressing comments in a planned, orderly, and data-driven way.

Councilmember Donelson seconded her comments about the polite and professional input. He encouraged the public to have their voices heard by participating in public commentary.

Next Board of Health meeting

The next Board of Health meeting will be **Wednesday, September 22, 2021, 8:30 a.m. - 10:30 a.m.**, in the Snow Conference Room at the Citizens Service Center, 1675 W. Garden of the Gods Road.

MOVED: by Commissioner Bremer, seconded by Ted Collas to adjourn the Board of Health meeting.

MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

Adjournment at 10:45 am.

25, August, 2021- BOH/MSeidenberg