El Paso County Public Health Director’s Report

To: The El Paso County Board of Health
From: Susan Wheelan, M.B.A. Public Health Director
Date: August 2023 (reflects activity for June and July 2023)

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It has been a productive and energizing summer with numerous developments to highlight as we rapidly approach the beginning of fall. This month’s agency report, which reflects activity during June and July (we did not have a Board of Health meeting in July, thus a consolidated report), captures the following key agency updates over the past two months.

In the News

- In June, El Paso County Public Health (EPCPH) Director Susan Wheelan shared with the Colorado Springs Business Journal (CSBJ) her vision for the future of EPCPH as Public Health continues to focus on COVID-19 recovery and other critical community health priorities which inform the agency’s work. Throughout the article, Director Wheelan emphasized that mental health continues to be a key area of focus for EPCPH, noting it that it has been a longstanding issue in our community further exacerbated by the pandemic. She reflected on efforts over the years to promote mental health supports and enhance community well-being, working with numerous organizational partners across multiple sectors. She also addressed the importance of access to care and, more specifically, how EPCPH supports this work through customized care coordination and navigation.

Program Spotlight

As you are aware, we have been searching for some time for a candidate with the right combination of public health knowledge and leadership experience to fill the role of Community Health Promotion (CHP) Division Director. In late June, Dacia Hudson, CHES® was selected to serve in this role.

Since late 2022, Dacia has provided support to CHP division while the director role was vacant. Her support has been valued by the team and during this time she has developed a deeper understanding of the needs and priorities of programs across the Division.

Dacia began her public health career in North Carolina after graduating from Appalachian State University and earning a bachelor’s degree in health promotion. As a public health educator, she worked with local communities to implement policy and environmental changes that increased physical activity, increased access to healthy foods, and decreased tobacco use and smoke exposure. Dacia joined the Tobacco Education and Prevention Partnership at El Paso County Public Health in 2012 and was promoted to program manager in 2015. For the past eight years, Dacia has managed policy level tobacco prevention initiatives to increase tobacco cessation, reduce initiation of tobacco use, decrease tobacco prevalence among youth, and decrease exposure to secondhand smoke. Dacia is a strategic networker, who brings enthusiasm and energy. She creates inclusive environments and sees the unique strengths that individuals bring to a team. She is a big picture kind of person and sees tremendous value in connecting and collaborating with others. Dacia is most excited about learning a new role within the agency and using her skills and experience to support the Community Health Promotion division.
Agency Operations

In 2008, the Colorado Public Health Act required the State Board of Health to establish, by rule, the core public health services that each county and district public health agency must provide or assure as well as establish minimum quality standards for those public health services. A revised ruling (6 CCR 1014-7), effective January 1, 2020, now requires state and local health departments in Colorado to ensure provision of seven Foundational Capabilities and five Foundational Services.

![Foundational Capabilities and Services](image)

El Paso County Public Health (EPCPH) fulfills its statutory requirement of providing these core public health services through the work of its divisions and programs. Activities supporting these services for the timeframe of this report follow.

**Foundational Public Health Capabilities**

**Assessment and Planning**

- **Strategic Plan: Update and Progress**
  Development of the agency’s Strategic Plan, which is completed every five years, continued during June and July with a core team of representatives from across the agency solidifying key objectives for EPCPH in the years ahead and identifying specific actions and progress metrics centered around the following goal areas: workforce, community engagement and trust, communications, partnership, and infrastructure. Throughout the strategic planning process, our aim has been to chart a course that is actionable and responsive to community needs, which have been identified in a soon-to-be published Community Health Assessment conducted by the Healthy Community...
Collaborative (HCC), a consortium of over 60 community partners and stakeholders convened by EPCPH. Parallel objectives are to assure alignment between the agency and the County’s existing plans, that the plan is conducive to an iterative process, and that it engages staff at all levels of the agency. The Board will be briefed on the developing plan in the coming weeks.

- **Public Health Data & Analytics (PHDA)**
  EPCPH’s PHDA Office partnered with the executive director of the Colorado Springs Health Foundation (CSHF) to present to the board of CSHF in July. As a critical community partner, the mission of the CSHF is to provide funding to target immediate health care needs and encourage healthy living in El Paso and Teller Counties. PHDA’s presentation apprised the CSHF board of current data and trends related to health, utilizing local data to make the most informed decisions for the health of El Paso County communities.

**Communications**

- The Office of Communication (OoC) issued two news releases on emergent summer topics and disease trends during the months of June and July (see full details below). Combined, these news releases yielded significant media coverage across all four local television stations, in addition to coverage in the Gazette and KOA AM radio. The total estimated viewership for these television stories is more than 290,000 and the estimated earned media value is more than $23,600.
  - The first release—sent on June 30—**urged residents to take steps to protect themselves and pets against West Nile virus, plague and hantavirus**.
  - The second release—sent on July 14—**announced the first rabid bat of the season in El Paso County.**

- As part of ongoing efforts to expand outreach to local community newspapers, the New Falcon Herald published an article by EPCPH Co-Medical Director Dr. Paul Mayer in its June edition. The article focused on the topic of heat safety, with steps residents can take to protect themselves.

- A comprehensive COVID-19 prevention campaign concluded in June. Funded by the Epidemiology, Laboratory & Capacity (ELC) grant from Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE), the campaign—which spanned August 2022 through May 2023—aimed to increase awareness of COVID-19 trends and resources, in addition to providing information on influenza prevention. Campaign materials were available in English and Spanish across a wide variety of digital platforms. In its entirety, the campaign had:
  - Over 12.6 million display ad impressions
  - Over 2.9 million Facebook ad impressions
Policy Development and Support

- EPCPH has been invited to serve on a planning group convened by Colorado Springs Mayor Yemi Mobolade to address mental health needs in the community. Mental Health in Colorado Springs is a key part of the new City administration’s priorities. The goal of the “Mental Health COS” Initiative, which is closely aligned with EPCPH’s longstanding objectives in this realm, is to bring community stakeholders and experts to the same table to work on a more collaborative evidence-based approach to addressing mental health challenges in our community. On July 17, Director Wheelan attended the inaugural meeting to kickoff the initiative, and a follow-up meeting with EPCPH and members of the Mayor’s Mental Health planning team will be held at EPCPH in late August.

Partnerships

- On June 7, EPCPH joined the El Pomar Foundation at an Investors Luncheon to celebrate the accomplishments and future of the Resilient, Inspired, Strong, Engaged (RISE) Coalition as it prepares to embark on its next phase. The journey to launch RISE began in 2016 when El Paso County Public Health received the El Pomar Foundation’s Possibilities grant—in the amount of $350,000—to be disbursed over seven years. The goal of this initiative was to enhance southeast Colorado Springs through resident-led change.

The event provided an opportunity to reflect on the unique approach to partnerships, highlighting how Public Health has been leading the way in forging innovative cross-sector collaborations for years. This funding and approach, which paired public and private resources, has become a model for community engagement. In subsequent years, the success of the RISE Coalition has led to increased funding and a ground-breaking capital project with the re-opening of Panorama Park, the largest neighborhood park renovation in City of Colorado Springs history.

Director Wheelan and Stella Hodgkins, senior vice president of opportunity and outreach at El Pomar, provided opening remarks followed by presenters:

  - Joyce Salazar, community outreach coordinator for EPCPH
  - Regina English, State Representative for House District 17 and RISE resident leader
  - Julie Ramirez, producer of Daily Dose 719 and RISE resident leader
  - Chris Cipoletti, business consultant and interim C-level provider
As RISE prepares to transition into its own entity, this pivotal event provided the opportunity to celebrate where RISE has been, while paving the path forward through community-focused networking and investment opportunities.

- The Tobacco Education and Prevention Partnership (TEPP) was a sponsor of the 2023 Pikes Peak Pride Festival held on June 10-11 at the Pioneers Museum. TEPP has sponsored the local Pride Festival since 2016 because, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Environment, the LGBTQI+ community is disproportionately affected by tobacco use and is targeted by the tobacco industry. The sponsorship promoted Enough with the Puff, a Colorado tobacco prevention campaign aimed at young adults. TEPP had a booth at the event and collaborated with EPCPH Care Coordinators to provide tobacco cessation information and promotional items to encourage residents to “take PRIDE in their health” by quitting.
• TEPP was a gold level sponsor of the El Paso County Fair and shared information on El Paso County Public Health resources as well as TobaccoFreeCO’s Clear the Air campaign during the week-long event. Messages from the Clear the Air campaign were used at the fair to raise awareness about the dangers of secondhand smoke exposure. This sponsorship was an opportunity for TEPP to reach rural El Paso County residents and provide tobacco and secondhand smoke prevention information. Sponsorship advertisements included electronic monitors, arena signage, social media spotlights, and logos on all fair materials. Additionally, TEPP had optimum visibility and presence in the Fair Zone, a free activity center for families and children, to outreach and offer resources to the community.

![Image of people at the fair]

Organizational Competencies

• **EPCPH Structure: Public Health Executive Team**
  The summer began with several important staff structure changes within the agency, among them a reconfiguration of our leadership team. What was formerly known as Public Health’s Leadership Team will now be the agency’s Executive Team, which consists of Public Health’s directors and officers. These changes come as part of ongoing efforts to streamline accountability and optimize agency operations and decision making. The Executive Team now consists of: Director, Deputy Director, Clinical Service Director (currently vacant), Community Health Promotion Division Director, Data and Analytics Officer (currently vacant), Development Officer, Environmental Health Division Director, Public Health Information Officer, Strategic Initiatives Officer, and Workforce Development Officer.

• **Financial Accountability and Transparency: Distinguished Budget Presentation Award**
  On June 1, the agency announced its fourth consecutive Distinguished Budget Presentation Award from the Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA). This award is an outstanding achievement, and it reflects our agency’s commitment to
exceeding the highest principles of governmental budgeting and fiscal transparency. Over the past year, Public Health leadership and staff invested significant time, training, and process improvements to support budget development and management. The Budget Book is a direct reflection of the thoughtful work of all our programs and divisions throughout the agency, and the value we place on accountability and transparency.

Learn more about the award here.

Read the full 2023 Budget Book here.

Emergency Preparedness and Response

- Effective July 1, Colorado implemented a new model for public health emergency planning and preparedness. Under the new model, EPCPH will no longer be responsible for public health emergency planning for all counties in the south central region of Colorado. This will allow the Emergency Preparedness and Response (EPR) team to focus on responsibilities to support El Paso County communities. In June, the EPR team facilitated the final 2022-23 South Central Regional meeting under the previous model and worked with state partners to support implementation of the new regional model.

- Emergency Preparedness and Response (EPR) team members attended Advanced Emergency Coordination Center Training at Pikes Peak Regional Office of Emergency Management (PPROEM). Training included members of all three emergency coordination sections and emphasized communication between sections and response to an evolving incident. A hotwash was held afterwards to help PPROEM staff plan future trainings and enhancements.

Social Determinants of Health (SDoH)

- New SDoH Partnership: Latina Equity Foundation
  Established in 2021, the Latina Equity Foundation was created to provide a critical network and support for Latino business owners, providing mentorship, networking opportunities, and resources. Following the organization’s inaugural meeting in late May of its newly established Health & Wellness Committee, of which EPCPH is a member, we have been engaged with the group over the past several weeks to help identify key performance indicators (KPIs) and data reporting requirements that EPCPH may support to inform the committee’s efforts to address specific health and wellness needs of Latina women in our community. EPCPH is uniquely positioned to provide the necessary data expertise to support the committee’s efforts, which will help to enhance Public Health’s reach into the Latina community.
Foundational Public Health Services

Communicable Disease Prevention, Investigation and Control

- Since the re-launch of the Communicable Disease program’s *What’s Going Around* bi-monthly newsletter in early June, subsequent editions of the newsletter have been issued summarizing local communicable disease trends with a focus on diseases more common during the summer months. The reports, which are available to the public on the EPCPH [website](#), provided detailed information during June and July on mosquito-borne disease and prevention measures, county and state level rabies reporting and tips to avoid rabies exposures, and an increase in Campylobacter in El Paso County and how to prevent Campylobacter infection, among updates on other reportable communicable diseases.

- Effective June 14, 2023, 6 CCR 1009-1 (Epidemic and Communicable Disease Control rule) was updated, and several new reportable conditions were added to the more than 70 reportable conditions monitored by public health in Colorado. These new additions included Blastomycosis, coccidioidomycosis, histoplasmosis, and RSV-associated hospitalizations.

- EPCPH epidemiologists presented two sessions at the Council of State and Territorial Epidemiologists (CSTE) annual conference in Salt Lake City, June 25-29. The selected presentations highlighted unique collaborations and innovative approaches to communicable disease control.
  - A Cluster of Multi-Serotype Invasive Pneumococcal Disease Among Persons Experiencing Homelessness and Use of Pneumococcal Conjugate Vaccine
  - Unvaccinated Dogs Exposed to Rabid Bat—an Atypical Public Health Response with Dog Owner Who Was a Person Experiencing Homelessness

Environmental Public Health

- On July 7, the Retail Food Program Manager attended a webinar hosted by the Philippine American Chamber of Commerce of Southern Colorado, Inc. (PACCSoCo). The webinar was geared toward new business owners wanting to sell food at special events in El Paso County. EPCPH explained the various license categories and answered specific questions on individual business models and the license best suited for their business type. The webinar was well received and has facilitated a strong partnership between the Philippine-American community and EPCPH. Our team has been invited to set up a booth at the upcoming Filipino Trade Exhibit: The Filipino Diaspora, on August 19th, to provide additional information to individual vendors. This is one example of Environmental Health’s ongoing efforts to build rapport with diverse segments of the restaurant industry, with the goal of sharing best practices for enhancing food safety.
Maternal, Child, Adolescent and Family Health

- The Maternal Child Health (MCH) program facilitates a “Community Voice Collaborative” (CVC) that consists of caregivers who have children with special health care needs and community partners that serve this population. The CVC was created to assist the Maternal Child Health program in evaluating access to care for children with special health care needs in El Paso County and to inform program strategies. The goals of CVC are to increase community engagement and integrate family voice in future programming.

Chronic Disease, Injury Prevention and Behavioral Health Promotion

- The Fountain Valley Communities That Care’s (FV-CTC) Childcare Strategy Team, a team of community members working to increase accessibility to and affordability of childcare, presented at the Shared Risk and Protective Factors Conference, May 31-June 2. The team presented on the creation of a newly formed non-profit association known as Fountain Valley Childcare Association for Resources, Education, and Support (FVCARES). The presentation provided information about the process of bringing an innovative idea to fruition. Given the outstanding accomplishments of this initiative, Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE) has identified FVCARES as a Communities That Care success.

- FV-CTC's Connect Me 2 FV Mini-grant review committee met and reviewed a total of fifteen applications. Out of fifteen applications, six were selected. Each mini-grant recipient will receive $5,000 to increase opportunities, programs and resources for youth in the City of Fountain. The six applicants selected are:
  1. Widefield Parks and Recreation
  2. Pike Peak Library District- Fountain Library
  3. Welte Education Center
  4. YMCA of the Pikes Peak Region- Fountain Branch
  5. Fountain UP
  6. Kids on Bikes

Access to and Linkage with Healthcare

- Through a partnership with Nourish Colorado and Ahavah Farms (a first-generation family farm in Peyton), 68 Women, Infants and Children (WIC) clients receive weekly Community Supported Agriculture shares through Ahavah Farms. Through the Farmers Market Nutrition Program, WIC clients can sign up to receive $30 vouchers for every eligible family member to spend at two local farmers markets. Both programs started in June and will run for the duration of the summer.

- WIC is providing resources and information to patrons and librarians at Pikes Peak Library District’s Family Place Libraries. WIC is working to provide further lactation
support to rural library branches, such as High Prairie, where clients have limited access to lactation information.

- In July, mobile WIC services continued at Fort Carson Army Community Services and Lutheran Family Services. New services started at Calhan Community Outreach Center, Catholic Charities, and Ronald McDonald House. These sites decrease barriers to services for residents in the eastern and rural portions of the county, caregivers with babies in the neonatal intensive care unit, WIC families living on the military installation, and refugee clients.

Operations Charts and Tables
Starting with the October 2023 Director’s Report, tables and charts reflecting operational activities to date in Environmental Health, Laboratory, Women, Infants and Children (WIC), Immunizations, Nurse-Family Partnership, Disease Prevention and Control will be provided on a quarterly basis. In the intervening period between reports, data will be provided upon request.

Board of Health Email Inquiries Report
Since Board of Health members receive all emails sent to the Board of Health email address (boardofhealth@elpasoco.com), and the volume of emails has decreased significantly since the implementation of the Board of Health email policy during the height of COVID-19 activity, with most emails currently received consisting of sales solicitations, we are discontinuing monthly reporting of email activity. We will resume reporting if the volume of emails increases and as situations warrant. The current process of transmission of emails directly to Board of Health members is in accordance with the policy established by the Public Health administrative team and approved by the Board of Health on Feb. 23, 2022.
Definitions of Foundational Terms

**Foundational Public Health Capabilities**

**Assessment and Planning** - Colorado’s governmental public health system will apply the principles and skilled practice of epidemiology, laboratory investigation, surveillance and program evaluation to support planning, policy and decision making in Colorado.

**Communications** - Colorado’s governmental public health system will be a trusted source of clear, consistent, accurate and timely health and environmental information.

**Policy Development and Support** - Colorado’s governmental public health system will inform and implement policies to meet the community’s changing health needs. Public health policies will aim to eliminate health disparities, reduce death and disability, and improve environmental quality and health outcomes for all people in Colorado.

**Partnerships** - Colorado’s governmental public health system will create, convene, and support strategic partnerships, engage community members and cross-sectoral partners, agencies, and organizations to achieve public health goals.

**Organizational Competencies** – No official definition from CDPHE but this section will be used to report on QI, accreditation, finance/budget, governance, awards, etc.

**Emergency Preparedness and Response** - Colorado’s governmental public health system, in coordination with federal, state and local agencies and public and private sector partners, will have the capability and capacity to prepare for, respond to, and recover from emergencies with health, environmental and medical impacts.

**Social Determinants of Health** - Colorado’s governmental public health system will intentionally focus on improving systems and institutions that exacerbate health disparities so that all people and communities in Colorado can achieve the highest level of health possible. Governmental public health will have the requisite skills, competencies, and capacities to play an essential role in creating comprehensive strategies needed to address health inequities, and social and environmental determinants of health.

**Foundational Public Health Services**

**Communicable Disease Prevention, Investigation and Control** - Colorado’s governmental public health system will carry out state and locally coordinated surveillance, disease investigation, laboratory testing, and prevention and control strategies to monitor and reduce the incidence and transmission of communicable diseases. Programs will target illnesses that are vaccine-preventable, zoonotic, vector-borne, respiratory, food- or water-borne, bloodborne, healthcare associated, and sexually transmitted as well as emerging threats. Communicable Disease Control will collaborate with national, state, and local partners to ensure mandates and guidelines are met and timely, actionable information is provided to the public and to health professionals.
**Environmental Public Health** - Colorado’s governmental public health system will use evidence-informed practices to understand the cause and effect relationships between environmental changes and ecological and human health impacts, to protect, promote, and enhance the health of the community and environment. Agencies will participate in the protection and improvement of air quality, water, land, and food safety by identifying, investigating, and responding to community environmental health concerns, reducing current and emerging environmental health risks, preventing communicable diseases, and sustaining the environment in a coordinated manner with agencies at the federal, state, and local levels as well as industry stakeholders and the public.

**Maternal, Child, Adolescent and Family Health** - Colorado’s governmental public health system will develop, implement and evaluate state-wide, regional and local strategies related to maternal, child, adolescent and family health to increase health and wellbeing, reduce adverse health outcomes and advance health equity across the life course. Strategies may include but are not limited to identifying and providing information, promoting evidence-informed and multi-generational approaches, identifying community assets, advocating for needed initiatives, and convening partners.

**Chronic Disease, Injury Prevention and Behavioral Health Promotion** - Colorado’s governmental public health system focuses on common risk and protective factors that affect social, emotional and physical health and safety. To prevent chronic disease and injuries and promote behavioral health, Colorado’s governmental public health system will use policy, systems and environmental change strategies to comprehensively address the root causes of poor health outcomes and advance health equity. Priority areas include, but are not limited to, nutrition, physical activity, oral health, access to care and disease management, injury prevention, violence prevention, suicide prevention, mental health and substance use (including tobacco, alcohol and other substances).

**Access to and Linkage with Healthcare** - All Coloradans should be connected with and have access to needed personal health care services that include primary care, maternal and child health care, oral health care, specialty care, and mental health care. All Coloradans should be connected with and have access to needed personal health care services that include primary care, maternal and child health care, oral health care, specialty care, and mental health care.