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: September 2023 (reflects activity in August 2023)

Table of Contents

In the News.............................................................................................................................................................. 2
Program Spotlight..................................................................................................................................................... 3
Agency Operations.................................................................................................................................................. 3
Definitions of Foundational Terms....................................................................................................................... 9
On the occasion of National Suicide Prevention Month, the entire El Paso County Public Health team offers our deepest gratitude to community and government partners, advocates and individuals who are working alongside us to prevent suicide. Throughout this month, EPCPH remembers those lost from suicide and acknowledges the profound grief experienced by families and friends. As discussed in an agency presentation to the Board earlier this year, suicide prevention remains a key Public Health priority. We are uniquely situated within the community to reduce risk factors and strengthen protective factors to help save lives, and we praise our community partners who work diligently each day to reduce suicide rates in El Paso County.

September is also National Preparedness Month and through efforts of our agency’s Emergency Preparedness and Response (EPR) program, we continue to emphasize the importance of being ready when disaster strikes and to provide information and resources to empower individuals, families and communities to prepare for emergencies that -- as we know all too well -- can happen at any time. One helpful resource we continue to promote is Ready.gov, which complements the information that our EPR program provides to the community on how to prepare for emergencies. Along with Pikes Peak region public safety and emergency management officials, we are also encouraging community members to sign up for official emergency notifications via Peak Alerts peakalerts.org, which sends out notification of emergencies, natural/man-made disasters, evacuation notices, missing persons alerts, law enforcement activity and other incidences. Sign-up is easy and takes less than three minutes. Alerts can be received via phone, text, app, email or web. Community members can sign up for alerts on the website or call (719) 785-1971 if they cannot access the internet.

I commend the Board for its proclamations in late August in recognition of these two health observances this month and for its steadfast support of Public Health programs and initiatives to address these important objectives.

In the News

- On Aug. 15, Director Wheelan joined local school districts, educators, administrators, legislators, and partners to discuss strategies to prevent fentanyl overdoses among students across El Paso County. Director Wheelan emphasized the role of public health in providing timely access to credible data, highlighting the quarterly data brief on fentanyl, which Public Health published in coordination with local county officials. She discussed the complexity of working with 17 local school districts across the county, noting that distributing accurate and credible information to assure everyone is aware of the dangers of substance misuse requires community collaboration. U.S. Rep. Doug Lamborn, who spearheaded this roundtable discussion, listened to partner input and concerns, and shared information on pending federal legislation which could provide significant aid in the effort to address the fentanyl crisis. The roundtable underscored the critical role of data in framing the issue and informing prevention strategies, while working with local partners and legislators to take action to assure the health, safety and well-being of our youth.

- On Aug. 21, the Gazette published an in-depth article on the recent grant to support congenital syphilis prevention efforts in the El Paso County Criminal Justice Center (CJC). In follow up to the presentation shared on this grant at the June Board of Health
meeting, the reporter reached out to El Paso County Public Health (EPCPH) to shed light on this timely topic. Co-Medical Director Dr. Paul Mayer and Reproductive Health Clinic Manager Summer South shared their insight and expertise on the rising rates of syphilis and how the grant will allow our teams to provide screening and treatment to high-risk populations in the CJC.

Program Spotlight
After an extensive candidate search, Jodeen ‘Jody’ Carrillo was hired in late August as our new Clinical Services Division Director. She will be responsible for the overall management of the division's teams comprised of our Reproductive Health Clinic, Immunization and International Travel Program, Nurse-Family Partnership Program and Tuberculosis Program. Jody joins our team after nearly twenty years of continuous local public health experience with Pueblo Department of Public Health and Environment during which she held positions of Associate Director of Community Health, Division Director of Disease Prevention and, most recently, Environmental Health and EPR Division Director. Jody holds a Master’s degree in management and Bachelor’s in Nursing and is well-versed in the needs and challenges of local public health agencies and the impacts of the COVID-19 response on the public health workforce. Jody brings real life experience in public health, a passion for the work, and demonstrable history of working with teams to improve processes and set goals.

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.

Image courtesy of the Colorado Association of Local Public Health Officials.
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**

- On Aug. 10 Public Health hosted the County’s Strategic Plan team for Objective 4, which focuses on fostering partnerships to improve community health and safety. The goal of the meeting was to highlight numerous efforts underway regarding issues such as substance use and suicide, while strengthening and coordinating efforts across County departments. The meeting provided a forum for Public Health to share key insight on several dashboards our agency is developing pertaining to substance use, opioids and the determinants of health. There was robust discussion around data and how to enhance visualization and communication of this information to the public, in addition to utilizing data to drive community strategies to address top health issues.

**Communications**

- On Aug. 1, the Office of Communication (OoC) issued a news release on the first human case of West Nile virus in El Paso County in 2023. The news release garnered media coverage across all four local television stations, in addition to coverage in the Gazette and KOA AM radio. There was significant media interest in West Nile virus throughout the month, with a total estimated viewership of more than 128,000 and an estimated earned media value of more than $13,000.

- The OoC also managed several print media inquiries on similar topics, with the addition of an in-depth story on a recent grant to address congenital syphilis.

- On Aug. 7, EPCPH and County partners published the second edition of the El Paso County quarterly data brief, referenced earlier in this report, with a spotlight on fentanyl. This quarterly publication is intended to provide El Paso County-specific data—with a focus on the impact of opioids—to help keep community partners and stakeholders informed on local data and resources needed to support the health and safety of all El Paso County residents. Deploying a collaborative approach to advancing the health of our communities, the data brief is one key component of a unique county partnership with representation from El Paso County, Public Health, Coroner’s Office, District Attorney’s Office, Justice Services, Human Services, and the Sheriff’s Office.

- EPCPH’s website www.elpasocountyhealth.org had 16,727 new visitors in August, with 31,795 unique pageviews.
Policy Development and Support

- On Aug. 1, EPCPH Board President, Ted Collas, Director, Susan Wheelan, and Development Officer, Carolyn Gery presented at the National Association of Local Boards of Health (NALBOH) Annual Conference in Tacoma, Washington. The presentation, titled, Reflect, Restore, Reframe: Advancing the Agency Benefits the Whole Community, presented a framework for developing the infrastructure for a sustainable and healthy agency based on the objective of EPCPH leadership to develop the workforce as the foundational element of an essential, community-driven organization. The presentation was well received by conference attendees. Other EPCPH attendees at NALBOH included Board Member, Dr. Richard Vu and Workforce Development Director, Carrie Sigmon.

Partnerships

- Several members of the EPCPH team presented at the 2nd annual Drug Information Opportunity Symposium, hosted at Pikes Peak State College. With attendees representing law enforcement and public health agencies throughout the state, the event provided a platform for cross-sector dialogue regarding strategies to reduce drug overdose deaths. EPCPH Deputy Director DeAnn Ryberg presented data on the local impact of drug overdoses, with a focus on fentanyl. Bridging from data to action, two members of EPCPH’s Communities That Care (CTC) coalition presented information on how CTC engages in primary prevention efforts to prevent youth substance use in the Fountain Valley. Board of Health member and El Paso County Commissioner Longinos Gonzalez, Jr. provided opening remarks for the Symposium, noting his support of CTC, his active involvement in the Region 16 Opioid Abatement Council, and the importance of collaboration between public health and public safety to help reduce drug overdose deaths in our local communities.
• In partnership with El Paso County Sheriff’s Office (EPCSO), Public Health’s Reproductive Health Clinic (RHC) staff conducted a joint site visit to Pueblo County jail to learn from their experience implementing an STI screening and treatment program for incarcerated women of reproductive age. In July, EPCPH began work to implement a similar program (as referenced earlier in this report) and are meeting routinely with EPCSO colleagues to develop plans and protocols to implement this program.

Organizational Competencies

• On Aug. 30, members of the Public Health Data & Analytics (PHDA) Office met with the data modernization director for the Colorado Association of Local Public Health Officials (CALPHO), which is preparing to launch data workgroups and create a statewide data lakehouse. A data lakehouse is a data platform that can store raw data from disparate data systems to accelerate and scale more advanced analytics. CALPHO’s efforts in this realm is intended to enhance data capabilities in epidemiology and other Public Health activities. This introductory meeting provided the opportunity to network, share ideas, and ensure that EPCPH is represented in this statewide workgroup, among several others convened by CALPHO and other public health entities in Colorado.

Emergency Preparedness and Response

• The Director of the Pikes Peak Regional Office of Emergency Management (PPROEM) met with EPCPH executive team members and toured public health. During his visit Director Notbohm provided an overview of PPROEM and highlighted the strong partnership and collaboration that continues to exist between the two agencies including the colocation of public health staff at PPROEM.

• An Emergency Management Specialist was selected to serve as a National Project Public Health Ready (PPHR) Reviewer. This role will help our Emergency Preparedness and Response team stay informed on changing PPHR requirements and provide an opportunity to review plans and best practices from other jurisdictions across the country.

Foundational Public Health Services

Communicable Disease Prevention, Investigation and Control

• The Immunization mobile team supported increased routine vaccines appointments for children every Tuesday in August to support demands of back to school immunizations.

• EPCPH team members continue to build scalable capacity to respond to communicable disease outbreaks through cross-training and identification of flexible resources to respond to emerging needs. Examples of this effort include:
Working with County Procurement, we secured a lodging contract to support isolation of people experiencing homelessness (PEH) who are impacted by communicable disease.

Six communicable disease team members completed qualified medication administration personnel (QMAP) training. This training teaches unlicensed staff members to safely administer medications under written physician license. Having team members trained in QMAP expands agency capabilities to support directly observed therapy (DOT) for tuberculosis as well as other response needs.

Six communicable disease team members were fit tested and trained on the appropriate use of respiratory protection to prepare them to respond to respiratory infectious disease threats.

Environmental Public Health

- As the busy summer street fairs and festival season winds down, the Environmental Health (EH) food safety inspection team continues to expand its reach beyond food establishments to conduct random inspections of vendors selling food at these events, focusing their work on events that draw the greatest number of attendees. Though this is not a statutorily required function of our Food Safety program, we provide this service, to the extent possible, to assure that vendors -- particularly those who are new and/or serving foods made from scratch – are adhering to proper food handling and sanitary guidelines to prevent foodborne illnesses.

Maternal, Child, Adolescent and Family Health

- The Maternal Child Health (MCH) program is addressing stress and burnout among caregivers who have a child with special health care needs through education and awareness. According to the Caregiver Action Network, an estimated 16.8 million people in America care for a child with disabilities. El Paso County has the highest number of individuals that meet the definition of children and youth with special health care needs in the state Colorado according to Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE), at 54,366 ages 0-25. Caregivers often report feeling unseen, unheard, and their own needs unmet. Their mental and physical struggle is a public health concern. To raise awareness among community partners and caregivers, the MCH team hosted a screening of a documentary titled, Unseen: How We’re Failing Parent Caregivers & Why It Matters. The “Unseen” documentary gives an unfiltered, honest glimpse into the lives of caregivers. This initial screening was held to start a dialogue with community partners and gauge interest for future education and awareness events.

Chronic Disease, Injury Prevention and Behavioral Health Promotion

- On Aug. 2, several members of EPCPH presented at the 2nd annual Colorado Drug Information Opportunity Symposium, hosted at Pikes Peak State College. With nearly 80 in-person and virtual attendees from law enforcement and public health agencies throughout the state, the event provided a unique platform to engage in cross-sector dialogue regarding strategies to reduce drug overdose deaths. EPCPH Deputy Director
DeAnn Ryberg presented data on the local impact of drug overdoses, with a focus on fentanyl. Bridging from data to action, two members of EPCPH’s Communities That Care (CTC) coalition presented information on how CTC engages in primary prevention efforts to prevent and reduce youth substance use in the Fountain Valley. Board of Health member and El Paso County Commissioner Longions Gonzalez, Jr. Gave the opening remarks at the Symposium, noting his support of CTC, his active involvement in the Region 16 Opioid Abatement Council, and the importance of collaboration between public health and public safety to help reduce drug overdose deaths in our local communities.

Access to and Linkage with Healthcare

- On Aug. 30, members of City of Colorado Springs Mayor’s Mental Health Initiative Team met with EPCPH to discuss current community behavioral health efforts and resources and to identify gaps that the new City administration may partner with Public Health to address, along with other County entities and local organizations -- among them, Lyda Hill Institute for Human Resilience at UCCS whose Executive Director, Dr. Charles ‘Chip’ Benight, was in attendance at the meeting. Dr. Leon Kelly, El Paso County Coroner and Board President of National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Colorado Springs also participated in the meeting. Among the areas discussed at length is the need for improved navigation services to connect people to mental health resources that are most appropriate for their individual needs. Public Health will continue to collaborate with the Mayor’s team over the next several months, including providing an inventory of existing behavioral health resources in the community as a starting point in developing a strategy for improving coordination of multiple efforts in the community, with the ultimate goal of improving access to mental health services.
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 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.