



WHATCOM COUNTY PUBLIC HEALTH ADVISORY BOARD MEETING MINUTES

AUGUST 5, 2021

Present: Jake Anderson, Steve Bennett, Barry Buchanan, Sterling Chick (Chair), Dr. Amy Harley, Leah Wainman, Lindsey Karas, Les Seelye

Absent:

Excused:

Topic	Discussion/Outcome
Call to order	Steve presented a land acknowledgement. Les will do the land acknowledgment for the next meeting. Roll call of Public Health Advisory Board (PHAB) Members.
Approve Minutes	Barry moved that the minutes from the May meeting be approved as presented. Steve seconded the motion. The board voted and the motion passed. Ayes: 7, Nays: 0, Abstain: 1
Public Comment	None.
Introduction of New Health Department Staff	Erika Lautenbach introduced new staff from the Health Department. Dr. Amy Harley, who has been serving on PHAB is stepping down from that role to serve as one of the Department's Health Officers. Sue Sullivan, who formerly served on PHAB, is the new Environmental Health Manager. Angela Foster and Hayli Hruza are new to the Environmental Health division and work in the on-site septic program.
Racial Equity Sub-Group Update	<p>Steve offered an update on recent activities of the sub-group.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A land acknowledgement has been added to the beginning of PHAB meetings. • Meeting discussion forms now include a section on equity considerations as a way to overtly think about how we are addressing equity in all our actions. • We are in the process of connecting with members of the Lummi and Nooksack Tribes to invite them to come to a PHAB meeting to share their experiences and increase communication. • In an effort to make PHAB more accessible to the community as a whole, we now have a PHAB email address that the public can use to directly contact PHAB. The address is PHAB@co.whatcom.wa.us and the Health Department Office Coordinator will be responsible for monitoring the inbox and forwarding messages to the PHAB Chair or other PHAB members, as appropriate. • We will also be working on updating some of the information on the PHAB website. <p>The next project the sub-group would like to take on is to convene representatives and staff facilitators from all the boards and committees under the umbrella of the Health Department to discuss opportunities to advance racial equity through increased diversity, community engagement, and use of racial equity tools. We want to pursue this both as a general way for PHAB to increase its engagement with other boards and committees and also, since PHAB put forth the racial equity resolution and racism as a public health crisis resolution, as a way of following through on those resolutions. Steve, Leah, and Lindsey would be the conveners, as representatives of PHAB, and as such, wanted to be sure PHAB was aware of and supportive of this effort. Feedback from the group included:</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Barry asked if Steve had been contacted by the group looking at external communications and that are pushing out a survey. Yes, Steve has seen that survey. • A question was raised about whether or not Executive Sidhu should be included in this discussion so that we are not working at cross purposes with other County racial equity groups. All the boards PHAB would be working with are under the Health Department umbrella and Erika can let Executive Sidhu know that we are working on this and keep him in the loop. <p>PHAB members offered their support to the sub-group to move forward with convening representatives from Health Department boards and committees.</p>
<p>COVID Community Health Impact Assessment Update</p>	<p>Erika introduced the presentation by praising the incredible work of the team that produced the COVID Community Health Impact Assessment. She noted that PHAB asked that the Health Department put together this assessment several months ago. This is the first public release of this report after presenting it to Health Department staff yesterday. Erika thanked the team that put together the report including Katie Stanford, Dean Wight, Jennifer Moon, Melissa Morin, Amy Fuller, Elizabeth Boyle, and Mardi Solomon. Erika introduced Katie Stanford, Health Assessment Specialist from the Health Department, to present the findings.</p> <p>Katie noted that what is being presented today just hit the highlights of the information available in the full report. (The full assessment can be found at www.whatcomcounty.us/covidimpact). This assessment goes beyond disease burden and studied how some of the foundations of health and well being were affected by the pandemic. The last Community Health Assessment was conducted in 2018 and this assessment serves to provide an updated understanding of where we stand after being through what we hope is the worst of this pandemic. Katie reviewed the population health framework which guides all of our assessments and guides how we measure public health. Since the team couldn't study every area affected by COVID, we limited this report to the priority areas identified by the ongoing Community Health Improvement Process – kindergarten readiness, child care, housing security, homelessness, and behavioral health. Katie reviewed key findings in each of the priority areas.</p> <p>Erika thanked Katie for the presentation and expressed her hope that this document can be a catalyst for our community to better align around these issues. Erika and Katie will be taking this presentation on a road show starting with the County Council next Tuesday, then over the next few weeks they will present to business organizations, all the city councils, foundations and their boards, state representatives, representatives from the governor's office, federal representatives, etc. Hopefully this can be a tool for when we think about the American Rescue Plan funding. There will also be a public release of the report next week. We are also creating a video that will be even more condensed and user-friendly than this PowerPoint that can be shared widely with the general public. Much of the work on addressing these issues is already happening with Healthy Whatcom, the Child and Family Well Being Task Force, etc. and that work will tie into the actual solutions and path forward around these issues.</p> <p>Discussion on the report included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is powerful work and I'm thinking of this as something that really needs to be incorporated into ongoing COVID response. • It is really impactful to be able to see this data laid out pre-COVID and post-COVID. This gives us a good place to start and thank you for all the work that went into that. • This is great work and it is really useful to have the data represented this way. I look forward to seeing how other organizations/partners/boards/etc. will respond to this. It is a good tool to focus decision makers on where we need to be going in the future. Since PHAB has been considering how we can get more involved and ingrained in the community and let other organizations know more about who we are and what we do, I think it's important to look at that last slide with all the partner organizations that were involved. That slide is a really great list of the partners that we should be opening up conversations with. • This is powerful work and really contributes to our ongoing community health improvement planning work. There are ongoing efforts like Healthy Whatcom that have convened many of those partners on that list to come up with ideas for solutions in a community organizing format with a focus on ensuring racial equity and with a focus on the perspectives of black, indigenous, and people of color. I'm so grateful for this work and just want to call out the existing processes to make sure we are coming together to plan in a coordinated way.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In gathering this information, did we get any information on public health in the jail? During the pandemic, visits with nursing staff went down immensely and there was a very large chunk of time where there wasn't any access to dental care. I'm also wondering about their access to vaccinations. This assessment didn't really look at COVID itself, but really focused on factors in our community health assessment. However, the County Council has passed legislation to have a commission look at those very things. The Council is planning a thorough look at how the response was handled within government and plans to have a full report by March. The Sheriff's office and the jail's response to the pandemic will be part of that, in addition to the Health Department, Emergency Management, the Health Board, the Executive, etc. Economic factors aren't really included in this report either (i.e. jobs lost, businesses closed, layoffs), but we believe our economic partners will be looking at that piece.
Brainstorm Topics for Joint Meeting with the Health Board	<p>Sterling noted that every year PHAB has a chance to meet jointly with the Health Board to talk about what we have done, what we are doing, and what we might want to do. PHAB members bring expertise and our role is to help identify goals and direction for the Health Board. There are some broad areas we would like to discuss including the COVID Community Health Impact Assessment, which can be used as a guide to the issues that need to be addressed as we figure out what the role of County government is in all of this. Another broad issue to bring to the joint meeting is racial equity. The other items to look at are related to recent state legislative action.</p> <p>Astrid gave a brief review of pertinent legislation passed in the last session. The legislature had a significant focus on public health this past year. There were two main threads, and one was around funding for Foundational Public Health Services (FPHS). There was a significant investment in public health and conversations about how that money will be used to provide FPHS are underway at the state level and within the Health Department. The other pertinent piece of legislation from this past year relates to the makeup of Health Boards. Many communities do not have a group like PHAB to advise elected officials and legislation will require those communities to create new health boards with particular requirements around membership. In Whatcom County, because we have an established PHAB, we are not required to create a new health board. However, there is an opportunity, if the Health Board chooses to move in a different direction with membership, for them to change their membership to fit the new legislation. The legislation on health board makeup is currently under review by the State Board of Health who will create the rules about how you go about changing your health board. The new law also some additional requirements for groups like PHAB including holding monthly meetings, adopting a health equity framework, and reviewing public health performance measures.</p> <p>Feedback on topics for the joint meeting included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The joint meeting is scheduled for an hour and a half, which is not enough time. These are three big topic areas and we need more time than that. Barry contacted the Council office and had the time extended to three hours. That would give roughly an hour for each broad topic with a short break between each item. Jake is on a break from school and offered to help as needed with preparing for the meeting. The first time PHAB did one of these joint meetings, the structure gave us a good opportunity to have personal discussions with Health Board members. Getting to know each other and bringing some humanity into the process while dealing with some of these potentially contentious topics is valuable. It would be good to try to build that into the process again. Making those personal connections while not able to meet in person presents a challenge, but is a good goal. In each topic area, PHAB should be identifying what the ask is before going into the meeting so we can be strategic about what information to present as background to guide the discussion. This one meeting may not be able to be everything – relationship building, discussions on each topic area, etc. This meeting may need to set the stage for what happens in PHAB and the Health Board throughout the next year. The last joint meeting was held on Zoom, some Health Board members were absent, and those that were present often seemed lightly engaged. How can we change that dynamic? Would it be more engaging if we can move through all the data and then get to the point of talking about solutions? That is probably what the Council is actually interested in, the practical aspects of how to move forward. Can we lessen the presentation part by sending the information ahead and focusing the meeting more on discussion? I know Council members are bombarded with information like this that they need to

	<p>absorb, but can we lessen the presentation and get to the action-oriented part? For instance, they will have seen the COVID Community Health Impact Assessment presentation before the joint meeting.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This feeds into one of our big topics which is the makeup of the Health Board. What we have found the last couple of years is that when we start talking about the action-oriented items we get a majority of the Health Board members responding to us with they aren't health professionals, that's your job. Because the Health Board members don't necessarily have a health or public health background, we spend a lot of that meeting time educating and showing data, in order to set up the action process. This can dovetail with a discussion on the makeup of the Health Board and how the two bodies can best work together. • This is one of the reasons that health board legislation was passed and COVID made that pretty obvious. • I'm excited about the presentation Katie and Erika made and what they are going to do with it. I have a special interest in advancing child care. I would like to see some of the COVID infrastructure money used in a public/private partnership for sustainable child care for Whatcom County - that would be my ask to the Health Board. I would also like to see us reach out to the Planning Department to see how we can change zoning to allow for more affordable housing, which would make this a better place for all of us to live. • There is some work going on to use ARPA money on child care. The Child and Family Well Being Task Force is working on solutions to child care. One of the biggest issues is being able to hire for child care work and that would be a good place to start approaching this issue. • Regarding zoning, the City of Bellingham really needs to be engaged in this conversation. At one point in time we had talked about putting a Bellingham City Councilperson on PHAB. What happened to that? This is something PHAB should revisit.
<p>Meeting Evaluation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thanks for being here in August which is vacation time for most folks. This was a great meeting. It will be good to plan for the meeting with the Health Board. The Health Board makeup has been on my mind for many months and I expect there will be a willingness to engage in conversation about that. • I'm encouraged by the work that Erika and Katie have done and for their tour of the county. I hope that builds some momentum to get things done and I really want us to push child care and affordable housing. Let us know how to support these efforts. • Thanks to everyone that presented. It was a sobering presentation and I am looking forward to supporting this work. • It was great to see everybody. That was an excellent presentation, such an amazing amount of work went into this. • I appreciate the opportunity to talk with you all. • Thank you so much for that report and the great data. I'm looking forward to sharing that information and to seeing how we can navigate this joint meeting. • I'm grateful we got to be a part of this project and really hope it's helpful moving forward. • Thanks for the time. I look forward to PHAB because I feel great camaraderie and support from all of you. Kudos to Katie, so excited to have her on board for these presentations. We will need to pull a small group together to plan for the joint meeting outside of the regular PHAB meeting, since the date of the next PHAB is so close to the joint meeting date. • Today was great and it is exciting to see everyone. I remember how recently we talked about needing an assessment like this and it is great to see it completed in this really digestible format. This gives us a direction going forward which I really appreciate. I'm looking forward to the meeting with the Health Board, especially since our last meeting was functionally pre-pandemic. It is truly a different world than when we last met with them. • Amy has to resign from PHAB because of her new position as a Whatcom County Health Department co-health officer, but is glad she will still be engaged in the work of PHAB through that role. • This assessment is the best report I have ever seen. It is so helpful and I will share it with others at work and with other boards I'm associated with.
<p>Adjourn</p>	<p>8:28 am</p>
<p>Next Meeting</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Next regular meeting July 1, 2021, 7:00 – 8:30 a.m. <u>VIRTUAL</u></p>