



WHATCOM COUNTY PUBLIC HEALTH ADVISORY BOARD MEETING MINUTES

MAY 6, 2021

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

Absent:

Excused:

Topic	Discussion/Outcome
Call to order	Sterling presented a land acknowledgement and thanked Judy Ziels for providing the wording. This will become a regular part of the meeting. Roll call of Public Health Advisory Board (PHAB) Members.
Approve Minutes	Les moved that the minutes from the March meeting be approved as presented. Amy seconded the motion. The board voted and the motion passed. Ayes: 8, Nay: 0, Abstain: 0
Public Comment	None.
Children and Family Well-Being Task Force Update	<p>Judy Ziels was in attendance to give an update on the work of the Child and Family Well-Being Task Force. Judy started by recognizing all the people involved in the Land Acknowledgement that she shared with Sterling.</p> <p>The Task Force has met four times now. The process is becoming more participatory. The group is working to establish norms that are more accessible and more family friendly including a consensus model of decision making. The group has been spending time considering the ordinance and what it is that they are being asked to do by the County government. The work will be grounded in results-based approaches, equity (particularly racial equity), and family involvement. At the next meeting, they will be breaking into work groups to dig into some of the deliverables - looking at infrastructure, increasing family involvement, resources and funding, and County/community collaboration (partnering with Healthy Whatcom). The first progress report is due to the County Council on June 1.</p> <p>Discussion on the Task Force update included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There was a big push for diversity, how did that go? This is definitely a diverse group of participants, but not as many people from outside of Bellingham or as many people who identify as nonwhite majority as we hoped for, but we certainly do have racial diversity, we have people who haven't participated in task forces before, we have a wide range of backgrounds and ages. • Astrid wanted to thank Judy and the other staff supporting the task force - Alison Williams, Samantha Murdoch, and Aly Robinson. • What kind of input does PHAB want on this process? The American Rescue Plan Act will bring lots of money to County government and decisions will be made now about where it goes. What role should PHAB have in talking to the Council and the County Executive about families and children being a priority? • The resolution on families first is already out there and should inform decisions made by the Council. • What is the process for deciding how to spend the money?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council has put forward an initiative for spending a good chunk of that money on childcare on a systemic level. Barry anticipates that will go to the Task Force for input. Barry can follow up with more information on the process. • There is also a separate pot of federal money coming into the County for childcare specifically. The COVID Impact Assessment will also help inform how the money is spent. • Steve suggested that PHAB should wait to hear more on the work of the Task Force and the COVID Impact Assessment before we give too much input because we don't necessarily have the data to inform those decisions now. • Would it be possible to get a big picture explanation of how the money gets distributed to the County and how it is allocated? We still don't have direction from the feds for allowable uses for all the funding sources that are coming, but we can talk more about that when we know. • PHAB's role should be helping the decision makers – the Council and the Executive – apply some criteria to their decision making about these funds, rather than advocating for specific projects.
<p>Racial Equity Sub-Group Update</p>	<p>Steve offered an update on what the subgroup has been discussing. They have met three times. One of the focuses has been not just talking about the big picture of the resolution, but also trying to figure out how we can apply the ideals of the resolution to how PHAB functions and how we can increase equity and inclusion in our own processes.</p> <p>One of the first changes made is including the land acknowledgement at the beginning of each meeting. In addition to the land acknowledge we did today, which would happen at every meeting, the group also talked about having an additional acknowledgement offered by a rotating PHAB member each meeting which could acknowledge any other group that is facing disproportionate violence, disproportionate health disparities, etc. The intention is for this to be an overt and thoughtful process that we are all actively engaged in.</p> <p>The other step we have taken is adapting our current PHAB and Health Board Discussion Forms. The change just adds one question to the discussion form addressing equity. The racism resolution states that racial equity should be considered as a part of all activities and decisions. By adding an explicit question about how any topic we take on addresses racial equity, we normalize equity as a part of our process. The new form is in the agenda packet.</p> <p>PHAB is insular in many ways. We often communicate with community groups when we have a project or need for feedback, but don't have continual open dialogue. One potential hurdle the group identified to maintaining dialogue with the community is that there is no direct way to contact PHAB – like a PHAB email. We also talked how we can facilitate better communication with the community, especially partners we have worked with in the past. An update email after each meeting to our community partners could help us build deeper relationships. This keeps them up on what we are doing and where we are going and makes us a better community partner. The group also discussed the possibility of convening various Health Department advisory boards and committees to better coordinate and unify around efforts around racial equity.</p> <p>Discussion on this topic included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The group also discussed that members might consider talking about the work PHAB is doing during any interactions with other relevant meetings/organizations. • How do we get people to understand what PHAB is and how we interact with the Health Board and the Health Department? Maybe some kind of educational campaign with social media posts could help get the word out. These efforts could increase our success with recruitment if the community has a better understanding of who we are and what we do. • It is striking that there is no direct way, like an email, for the community to contact PHAB. • Has there been any thought of working with the Incarceration Prevention and Reduction Task Force? As a public health issue and a racial equity issue we should be addressing the disproportionate incarceration of Native American and Black residents of Whatcom County. Yes, they would be included in the groups we would be convening to make sure we are being mutually supportive and synergistic. • The Whatcom County Racial Equity Commission has a community visioning meeting scheduled on May 22 from 10-2. This group will be coordinating racial equity efforts across the City of Bellingham and Whatcom County, in partnership with Chuckanut Health Foundation. It would be valuable for PHAB members to attend the May 22 session.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the next steps for PHAB? Health Department staff can check on rules around emails and come back with a proposal for how to approach that. • Some work is being done internally at the Health Department around coordinating different boards and commissions, Astrid can work with the Racial Equity Subgroup on this. • It would also be good for any available members to go to the Whatcom County Racial Equity Commission. Would we be attending as a representative of PHAB? Would PHAB have an official role on the Commission? That hasn't been determined yet, as the Commission is still forming. The visioning session on May 22 is the start of that process. Barry requested a list from Erika of Health Department boards and commissions that the Whatcom County Racial Equity Commission should be in contact with. • Astrid also noted that last week there was an introductory meeting of a cross-departmental working group of County employees that will be looking at issues of racial equity and how to move that work forward within County government. This work is in direct response to the racism resolution and will look at things like policies and procedures, hiring practices, board and commission make-up, etc. • While listening to the discussion around coordinating with County groups and community groups, Amy wondered what role health care agencies play in this? How do health care delivery groups get tied into this? PHAB is a governmental organization and not an independent organization. However, one reason PHAB has representation from a variety of sectors is to bring in connections to those sectors. Ideally, each member is bringing information and perspective to PHAB and also communicating about the work of PHAB. • One of the strengths of PHAB is how we stay connected to people from different parts of the health system and how we bring those parts together.
<p>COVID Impact Assessment Update</p>	<p>Dean Wight is employed part time with the Health Department and is leading the COVID Impact Assessment team. The rest of the COVID Impact Assessment core team includes independent consultants Elizabeth Boyle and Mardi Solomon, as well as Katie Stanford and Amy Fuller who work in Health Information Assessment at the Health Department. The team's initial challenge has been figuring out a manageable scope for the project to work within the deadlines and get PHAB the information they need. One key question they have been asking is what quantitative information do we have since our experience with COVID that we can compare to baselines to get an idea of what has shifted in those key areas identified by the CHIP – childcare, kindergarten readiness, housing and homelessness, and mental health (particularly youth mental health). The core group has met with a feedback group (members of leadership of the Health Department) to check that we are proceeding the right direction. There is parallel work going on looking at quantitative data, and also looking at where gaps in that data can be informed by qualitative data. This project is not creating primary data sources, but rather is searching for existing data on impacts of COVID. One example is Amy Rydel's project with Western, a survey of agency staff to understand the impact of COVID in each of their key areas of work. Another example is a survey conducted by the Opportunity Council of a sample of its clientele. The next two weeks the group will be doing focused sessions on each of the four focus areas. In addition to gathering data on these issues and how they have been impacted by COVID, we are also gathering a list of resources available (or coming) to the community that may be used to face these issues -- getting an understanding of what money is coming. How have disparities in health outcomes been impacted by COVID? The working hypothesis is these issues have been exacerbated by COVID, but we will see if the data back that up. The timeline is to have a report in final form ready in late July.</p> <p>Discussion on the COVID Impact Assessment included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Erika noted that we are also coordinating closely with the Regional Economic Partnership and the business community to make sure we are reflecting economic impacts that have connection to these health factors. Dean noted that Jennifer Noveck who works with the Regional Economic Partnership came to the core team meeting this week and laid out the data they have been collecting. The clear message is we are looking at a lot of the same data, but with a different lens. • Access to mental health professionals has been more easily accessible for Medicaid patients than private pay patients. While that divide may still exist, it appears that things have gotten worse for people on Medicaid over the course of the pandemic. This is largely a workforce issue – innumerable positions are going unfilled. • It used to be that people could get same day access to mental health services, but that is no longer the case. People are waiting weeks or months just for an initial intake. • Sterling can speak to that directly, as Catholic Community Services can't find mental health staff to hire and have had positions sit unfilled for over a year. This problem existed before COVID, but it is worse now.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The ALICE report calls those living above the poverty level but below a living wage the “nurturing band” and mental health staff and other direct service providers often fall in this band. We need to ask how the County or the government can intervene in a living wage issue. • I am really excited to see this process start. The report will add some clarity to questions PHAB has about where money should go. We generally believe things are worse than pre-COVID, but this report will hopefully help answer some of the questions about the capacity of our community to deal with these issues. • It will be useful to have quantitative data to back up our understanding of the impacts of the pandemic. What is the plan for disaggregating data? The group will disaggregate the data whenever possible, but that will be a limited set. We have data that can be disaggregated at the state level, and some at the county level, but we may not be able to go smaller than that. We will have to interpolate from larger data sets in some cases. • This report will be a timely guide to help policy makers decide how to spend the money coming in to help fight the damage to the community brought by COVID. • Dean emphasized that this report should serve to augment the decisions and recommendations that are already in the works by the Health Department, rather than trying to make a whole independent set of recommendations.
Meeting Evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This was a great meeting. I appreciated the feedback on the racial equity work and hearing about how the COVID Impact Assessment is progressing. • The meeting was informative. I appreciate being here and found it interesting to think about how the public can more directly engage with and inform the work of PHAB. • This was a good meeting. It feels like we are moving forward and making progress. • This was a good meeting because we were able to focus more on informing each other of work that is happening rather than hashing out how to tackle problems. We are finally able to do more looking forward and planning ahead. • It was nice to have not such a packed agenda which allowed time for good discussion. I want to express appreciation for my coworkers who are moving these projects forward despite how busy we still are with COVID. • I am really excited about the Task Force update. The work to make the structure more inclusive for families is really exciting and I hope that we can continue that trend into the future. • I appreciated being able to be a part of the discussion and appreciated learning a great deal in other areas. • I enjoyed being here and hearing about the progress being made. I am looking forward to seeing how the meeting on May 22 goes. Thanks to everyone here for all of the work and time you are putting in. • I appreciate how each agenda item included a discussion on aligning our work with the broader work happening in the County, so we are doing the best for the entire community, not just our PHAB group. I appreciate all of you and your work. • We are fortunate to have you all as partners in public health as we lean into the challenges of making this a healthier community. Thank you all. • Coordination is so important. There are so many different discussions going on with different groups about things like equity and how to use the money coming in for COVID relief, and there isn't enough coordination. Also, all the topics we discussed today are very timely with the American Rescue Plan Act money coming and the racial equity commission being formed. Great job presenting and constructing the agenda for this meeting. Thanks to the leadership for that. • I really appreciate the optimism and vision of this group. I feel challenged today to ask myself what I can bring to this group from my discipline that would support PHAB in achieving its goals. • I agree that its better not to pack the agenda to allow for discussion. Momentum and alignment were two words that came to mind throughout the meeting.
Adjourn	8:18 am
Next Meeting	<p style="text-align: center;">Next regular meeting July 1, 2021, 7:00 – 8:30 a.m.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><u>VIRTUAL</u></p>