



## WHATCOM COUNTY PUBLIC HEALTH ADVISORY BOARD MEETING MINUTES

SEPTEMBER 8, 2022

**Present:** Steve Bennett (Chair), Leah Wainman, Lindsey Karas, Shamika Brooks, Sterling Chick  
**Absent:** Barry Buchanan, Therese Horan, Edna Revey, Les Seelye

Topic	Discussion/Outcome
<b>Call to order</b>	Steve presented a land acknowledgement. Roll call of Public Health Advisory Board (PHAB) Members.
<b>Approve Minutes</b>	Sterling moved that the minutes from the March meeting be approved as presented, Leah seconded. The board voted and the motion passed. <b>Ayes: 3, Nays: 0, Abstain: 2</b>
<b>Public Comment</b>	The following people spoke: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Natalie Chavez</li> <li>• Darcy Hocker</li> </ul>
<b>Health Board/County Council Update</b>	None.
<b>Health Director/Health Officer Update</b>	<p>Co-Health Officer, Dr. Greg Thompson presented a brief update on COVID including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Current case rates, test positivity rates, hospitalization rates, and deaths;</li> <li>• Community case levels across the country (Washington State is in the low community case level as defined by the CDC);</li> <li>• An update on vaccines and bivalent boosters;</li> <li>• Death rates by vaccination status for the course of the pandemic.</li> </ul> <p>Dr. Thompson also presented a brief update on MPV (Monkeypox):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 488 cases have been identified in Washington State and only 1 in Whatcom County,</li> <li>• Testing is available at most clinical offices,</li> <li>• Treatment and vaccine are available locally.</li> </ul> <p>Discussion centered on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How are COVID rates being monitored now that so many people are testing at home? In Whatcom County we are still tracking reported infections. Since not all positive home tests are reported, we also look at test positivity rates from the airport testing site to give us a sense of the trend. We also look at the number of visits to PeaceHealth clinics and emergency room visits with COVID diagnoses associated with them. Those can give us a rough estimate of the direction cases are trending in the community.</li> <li>• Do you think COVID will become like the flu with annual vaccine boosters available? It's hard to say since we are still learning so much about it. Currently, COVID is putting out new variants at four times the rate we usually see with flu. We will need to see how that looks over the next few years and if we see seasonality associated with COVID like we do with the flu.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Flu vaccination rates were high the first year of COVID and then dipped significantly the following year. Since so many people are back in schools and workplaces now, do we communication planned about the importance of flu vaccination? Our winter flu predictions are often based on what happens in the Southern Hemisphere the winter before. It was a worse than average flu year in Australia, so we can likely expect something similar here, especially as we are seeing less masking and social distancing now. There is also less built in immunity with fewer people being vaccinated last year and fewer people infected with flu recently. As a Health Department we need to be communicating the importance of getting the flu vaccine this year.</li> </ul>
<b>Community Health Assessment Update</b>	<p>Amy Hockenberry gave a presentation on the Community Health Assessment (CHA). The slides were shared with members in the agenda packet.</p> <p>Discussion included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>One potential role for PHAB in the CHA may be to bring more community engagement to the process.</li> <li>When the COVID Health Impact Assessment was done, there was a group convened to review drafts and provide feedback and high-level reviews. Perhaps PHAB could take a similar role for the CHA, especially as PHAB is growing and will have representatives from the other Health Department boards and committees.</li> <li>It's exciting to hear there is a focus on assets-based reviews instead of only needs-based reviews.</li> <li>It will be interesting to see how things like school performance measures and day care spots look compared to pre-pandemic and if we are getting back to closer to normal.</li> <li>Our 2018 CHA was the first assessment we had done that contained such comprehensive data. Now that we have that under our belt, and also have the Community Health Improvement Process (CHIP) and our COVID Community Health Assessment, we're not starting from scratch. It will be interesting to see how we incorporate what we have previously learned into the CHA.</li> <li>How do we make sure that this CHA doesn't take us off course of areas of need that our community has noted in CHIP, while still taking note of areas we've improved or areas where we are tracking worse than the State as a whole? How do we balance the need to move those CHIP priorities with providing flexibility to incorporate new priorities that might come up?</li> <li>We could consider setting up a task force of PHAB members to assist the group working on the CHA as a first contact point from PHAB. Then the Health Department and that task force could determine points in time when this work should be brought back to the full PHAB group.</li> <li>About an hour of the PHAB/Health Board joint meeting in October will be dedicated to the CHA and CHIP.</li> <li>Five years ago we had great community engagement in this process. How are we looking at what groups in our community may have been missed or places where we're falling short? We will use lessons learned from these past experiences so we can tell the stories of those in our community, with the help of those in our community.</li> <li>Amy will work with Erika and Steve to draft a proposal based on this feedback to bring back to PHAB with a roadmap for working together on the CHA.</li> <li>It would be helpful to include a timeline for the CHA over the next year or year and a half and what each of the phases of work would look like.</li> </ul>
<b>PHAB Member Priorities and Interests/Team Building</b>	<p>Laura Todd works as a consultant for the Health Department and was in attendance to facilitate a discussion on PHAB member priorities and interests and to foster team building. PHAB members and pending members were asked to speak on the following questions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Name and role with PHAB.</li> <li>What is your passion, interest and/or hope for your/our community?</li> <li>What are you bringing to PHAB (passion, expertise, connections, commitment)?</li> <li>What might you want to learn from this experience?</li> </ul> <p>Introductions from members and pending members:</p>

- Chris Brown is a member of the Veterans Advisory Board, a clinical social worker at the Bellingham Vet Center, and board president of Growing Veterans. Chris will be joining PHAB to bring that experience to the group. He's interested in how to build a stronger link between PHAB and the Veterans Advisory Board.
- Sterling Chick has been a PHAB member for four years. He is the clinical director of Catholic Community Services. His work centers on mental health, especially for children and low-income families.
- Lindsey Karas works for Mercy Housing as the housing and education manager. A real highlight of being a PHAB member has been the breadth and depth of what the group is able to explore and Lindsey looks forward to continuing to learn more about the community through this work. She's learned a lot about how Council works and wants to continue organizing with the community to make change.
- Mike Massanari is a retired physician and professor of medicine. He spent his career as an internal medicine specialist and infectious disease specialist, and also trained in preventative medicine and epidemiology. Mike is a pending PHAB member representing the Behavioral Health Advisory Board. Mike is committed to advocate for those who are marginalized in our society and he has an interest in the broader issue of community health. Several years ago, he was involved in one of the county community health assessments and wanted to say an affirmation about Amy Hockenberry and her work, as he has seen the CHA has been much improved over the years.
- Shamika Brooks is a new member of PHAB and a nurse practitioner. As a nurse practitioner, she has always been an advocate for community health. She is committed to PHAB's work and excited to learn how policy is made at the local level and how her professional experience can help.
- Teri Bryant is a pending PHAB member, director of the Whatcom Homeless Service Center, and serves on the Housing Advisory Committee. Teri's passion is ending homelessness. She stressed the impact homelessness has on health, both while an individual is homeless and how those impacts persist even for individuals who move on to stable housing situations.
- Christine Espina is a faculty member in the Western Washington University nursing program, member of Healthy Whatcom, and a pending PHAB member. Personally, as the mother of a five-year-old, she has been navigating child care and the Bellingham Public School system. She has been closely involved with CHA and CHIP through her Healthy Whatcom work. Her passion is community health and she is trained as a community health nurse and has done some international work. Working in the hospital system and seeing how broken the health care system is pushed her upstream to want to work with students. She views her work in education as upstream intervention. She will bring her passion and expertise, but also her lived experience as a woman of color here in Whatcom County, to the table as a PHAB member.
- Steve Bennett is a professor of public health at Western Washington University. Steve started as a member of PHAB about three meetings before COVID hit. Steve expressed how happy he is that PHAB took this time to get to know each other. Being reminded of the diversity of experience and the passion of all the new and existing members is really exciting, as is seeing how PHAB can continue to partner with the Health Department on developing impactful policy for the county. Steve is a parent of two five-year-olds and is personally struggling with navigating after school child care. Infectious disease and health equity are of particular interest, but Steve will dive into any and all public health topics.
- Leah Wainman is a PHAB member and this year is serving as the vice chair. She started as a PHAB member maybe two meetings before COVID hit. Her undergrad degree is in sociology, but then she went into the Peace Corps and fell in love with public health. As she has become more familiar with community coalitions and county government, she sees this work as a beautiful example of our democratic process where community voices can really guide public policy. It's nice to be able to make change at the local level without getting bogged down in national politics. Leah works in public health for a neighboring county. She's excited to build relationships with other advisory groups and to continue to help our policy makers make good decisions about public health.
- Erika Lautenbach, director of the Health Department, noted that public health impacts everything and everything impacts public health. While it is one of the most challenging areas of policy, it is also one of the most impactful. Public health offers Erika a way to help others and to be in a position to make our community better
- Greg Thompson, WCHD Co-Health Officer, mentioned that he was at a statewide health board orientation, with Council Members Frazey and Galloway. The orientation meeting really brought to light the challenges we face statewide, with Council Members not being full time employees and with so

	<p>many issues for them to stay apprised of, the amount of time they have to dedicate to public health is limited. The more we can package and present public health information in a useful way to the Health Board, the better for the community.</p> <p>Laura asked members to continue the conversation by talking about what kind of resources would be helpful to them in their work on PHAB:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leah mentioned that the state health board training included a good primer on governmental public health that would be useful for PHAB members to see where we are in the bureaucratic process. Leah will see if she can access those slides to share with the group.</li> <li>• It would be useful to have a clear manual for PHAB members including things like how many members can serve on a task force, how to engage in the policy process, deadlines/timelines for getting agenda items to Council, how far in advance materials need to be ready for PHAB meetings, lists of other advisory boards, membership processes, the difference between proclamations and ordinances, etc. PHAB members are very empowered in the policy process and understanding the nuts and bolts of the process would help.</li> <li>• Whatcom County is a member of the Government Alliance on Race and Equity (GARE). However, GARE information is not easily accessible to PHAB members. While we are engaged in racial equity work, it would be useful to have easier access to GARE resources.</li> <li>• It would be helpful to have more our role as a PHAB member more clearly defined role and to know more about where we can exert our power.</li> <li>• Is there a possibility of more staff support for PHAB? Erika noted that the Health Department has put in a request to use Foundational Public Health Services funding for a policy position that could support PHAB and the Health Board, in addition to all the other boards and commissions that the Health Department staffs. This position could take a higher level look at how each board and commission decides which issues to bring forward rather than boards and commissions just being reactive to issues staff bring forward.</li> <li>• For 2023, we want to create a work plan for PHAB incorporating what everyone shared today. We will build on themes and concepts to get us to common goals and build on that over the course of the year. We would like to do work plans like this with all our boards and commissions as a way to use our volunteer members time more effectively.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Meeting evaluation</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lindsey appreciated hearing more about everyone, and learning about their interests and passions.</li> <li>• Leah agreed with Lindsey and expressed enthusiasm for all the support for public health.</li> <li>• Sterling noted that this will be an interesting year coming up with all the new members and he hopes PHAB can start 2023 with momentum brought by our new members.</li> <li>• Steve is really happy we took the time to do this team building today. Understanding what drives people can determine what policy emerges from this group. He noted hearing themes of equity, access, social determinants of health, housing, economics, and lived experience. All these passions and experience will intersect to make an exceptionally strong PHAB moving forward.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Adjourn</b></p>	<p>8:30 am</p>
<p><b>Next Meeting</b></p>	<p><b>Next regular meeting – Joint meeting with the Health Board – 10/4/2022</b></p>