



WHATCOM COUNTY PUBLIC HEALTH ADVISORY BOARD MEETING MINUTES

NOVEMBER 3, 2022

Present: Steve Bennett (Chair), Shamika Brooks, Barry Buchanan, Sterling Chick, Christine Espina, Lindsey Karas, Michael Massanari, Emily O'Connor, Edna Revey, Les Seelye, Greg Thompson, Vesla Tonnessen

Absent: Christopher Brown, Teri Bryant, Therese Horan, Leah Wainman

Topic	Discussion/Outcome
Call to order	Christine presented a land acknowledgement. Roll call of Public Health Advisory Board (PHAB) Members.
Approve Minutes	Sterling moved that the minutes from the September PHAB meeting and the October joint PHAB/Health Board meeting be approved as presented. The board voted and the motion passed. Ayes: 8, Nays: 0, Abstain: 4
Public Comment	None. Steve announced that PHAB will be accepting verbal public comments at meetings only on topics on that meeting's agenda. Written public comments are always accepted and will be shared with members.
Health Board/County Council Update	Barry gave the following updates on Health Board and County Council activities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Council has approved the formation of the Whatcom Racial Equity Commission. The Justice Project is currently ramping up their public engagement process. They are soliciting feedback via a survey and a town hall. PHAB members should have received a link to take the survey and an invitation to the town hall which will be held on 11/15 at 6pm in Council Chambers and virtually. The main focus of the town hall will be time for an extensive public comment period and then those comments will be incorporated into the final recommendations of the Stakeholder Advisory Committee (SAC). SAC has also created a work group to look at the competency restoration process. Currently, there is a long wait time for treatment for these seeking restoration of competency to stand trial with the soonest available treatment in May of 2023. The new work group will look for ways to improve competency restoration including looking at the possibility to get some state level funding.
Health Director/Health Officer Update	Co-Health Officer, Dr. Greg Thompson presented a brief update on COVID, MPV (Monkeypox), and other respiratory illnesses. The slides are appended to these minutes. Steve noted that generally RSV is mostly a problem for really young kids (infants and toddlers) and asked if that is still what we are seeing? Dr. Thompson noted that all ages of people get RSV, but infants under six months are at the greatest risk for hospitalization and it is usually one of the top causes of hospitalization of kids in the winter. Erika shared these updates: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Health Department is in the midst of the budget process for the biennium 2023-2024 budget. On Tuesday the Health Department leadership team met with the County Council to talk about the budget. It's about a 43 million dollar budget and is very complicated with a lot of funding sources. County general funds only make up about 7% of that budget, with the rest of the funding coming from local sales tax, property tax, state grants, federal grants, or other allocations. For instance, we receive about 2.6 million dollars in foundational public health funding from the state. With that new foundational public health



funding, what we're proposing to the Council, with the Executive's approval, is to keep some of our existing positions that we recognized during COVID were a value to the department, and are also proposing to add four new positions. The four new positions are 1) equity, 2) workforce development, 3) policy, and 4) evaluation.

- The Health Department's strategic plan has officially launched and is on the department webpage. PHAB members should have received an email from Erika with the executive summary and a one-page infographic. Erika thanked all those at the joint Health Board/PHAB meeting for providing valuable input that changed the document and the direction of the department. The strategic plan will launch in January.

Emily, as a new PHAB member, asked to hear about the role of members in the budget process. Erika responded that the Health Department generally gives a budget presentation to PHAB in July. The budget as it is presented in July contains what the Health Department is requesting for the budget. At this stage, the budget has gone through the Executive's office and is before Council for approval. Erika is happy to share whatever budget details members would like, either inside the meeting or one on one.

Steve pointed out that the direction of PHAB is determined by the members, so if more detailed budget discussions are an interest, that can happen. We will talk about that more as we move into the next topic.

Steve welcomed the new members and gave those in attendance a chance to introduce themselves:

- Emily O'Connor is a new member representing Healthy Whatcom and is the executive director of Lydia Place, which includes work in the areas of housing, kids, parenting, and mental health. Emily is also a parent of three kids and will bring that perspective to PHAB, as well.
- Dr. Christine Espina (she/her pronouns) has been a Healthy Whatcom planning team member since 2019 and teaches in the nursing program at Western Washington University. She is a community health nurse by training and is the parent of a five-year-old.
- Dr. Michael Massanari is a retired physician, former professor of medicine, and infectious disease epidemiologist. He represents the Behavioral Health Advisory Board. He is particularly interested in the portion of the strategic plan dedicated to quality improvement/quality management. Particular areas of interest include:
 - What level of resources are dedicated to quality improvement/quality management?
 - What sort of measures are designed to assess these programs? I'm particularly interested in process measures because if you are going to use this for management, it has to be more than outcomes.
 - Will you (and how frequently) be reporting those measures out to PHAB?
- Vesla Tonnessen is the coordinator for the Whatcom Early Learning Alliance (WELA) and represents the Child and Family Well Being Taskforce. Vesla also works with the Healthy Whatcom group. Most of her role in WELA over the past few years has been expanding the framework of Help Me Grow which is a cross-sector, system-wide approach to improving access to resources for young children.

Steve wanted to reiterate that while our new members are bringing perspective and information from their roles on other county boards/committees/taskforces, their role is not limited to representation of that group. Individual voices and experiences are really important to this group.

Barry pointed out for the new members that the formation of the Whatcom Racial Equity Commission (WREC) was a product of work started in this committee. Barry has been with PHAB since 2014 and has seen how the work here can lead to major policy for the county, as evidenced by the adoption of the Racism as a Public Health Crisis Resolution and subsequent formation of WREC.

	<p>Steve noted that this is a great time for new members to be coming in as we are starting to develop work plans and priorities for the coming year. This year has been a rebuilding year as we emerge from the acute stage of COVID.</p>
<p>2023 Draft Workplan</p>	<p>Erika created a pretty comprehensive, bulleted list of issues (included in the agenda packet) that the PHAB may want to take up. The intent is to work on issues that can be moved toward policy and action, and not to have PHAB be just a briefing body that hears reports from Health Department staff. This discussion is intended to get a sense of which issues seem ripe and relevant for PHAB interest and action, either for a subcommittee or the entire board to come up with policies that can be moved forward to the county council or executive or taken up by the Health Department.</p> <p>Discussion on workplan priorities included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sterling has served on PHAB for four years. His main priorities are children and families, the children’s fund, and behavioral health needs. • Christine has been doing some research on long COVID and is curious about how we are equipping our workforce to address long COVID and preventing COVID, learning more about ventilation and filtration especially in school systems, and interested in thinking about our role in the built environment. Erika noted that Health Department staff are always available for briefings on specific issues like this, either for individuals or for the group. • Les said one of his main concerns is child care. While he is still hoping to see proposition 5 pass, he’s interested to see what we will do if it doesn’t pass and how we can come up with a plan for our children. • Vesla noted that the implementation plan for the children’s levy will happen whether the levy passes or not and could still be a body of work for PAHB regardless of the outcome of the levy. There is an opportunity to define priorities and a build a basis for applying for grants and funding sources if the levy fails. • Steve would like to see PHAB engage with the opioid situation in Whatcom county. From a political standpoint this is often looked at as a policing issue, but we could highlight it as a public health issue to balance that perspective. • Lindsay’s main concerns are homelessness and housing, and updates from the Whatcom Racial Equity Commission. She also appreciates being able to explore topics that she wouldn’t think of herself and looks forward to hearing about the interests and concerns of other board members. • Steve noted that PHAB often has various topics they are working on at any given point in time. Much of that work happens in task forces or subcommittees outside of regular meeting and is then brought back to the full board. Members will all have a chance to decide which body of work you would be interested in digging into more. This is where lots of policy actually comes from, then PHAB as a whole can respond and give feedback on draft policies from subcommittees. • Emily is curious about use of resources and where PHAB can help move things forward rather than taking resources out by asking to be educated on things. She is concerned with how PHAB can best play an advocacy role with things like the Child and Family Well-Being Action Plan and how we identify areas where we can move things forward. Her primary concerns are in the areas of prevention and kids and she would love to make sure PHAB pushes the things that ensure prevention and public health. • Steve noted that this is a good time to redefine priorities, since for so long, COVID took the vast majority of our attention. While PHAB certainly won’t address all the issues on this list, the following themes seem to be emerging through this conversation – interest in budget and oversight, child and family well-being (including child care and child welfare, housing and homelessness). These three big areas give us a good framework to start organizing around. • Shamika works in long term care as a nurse practitioner. Whatcom County is currently seeing mergers among some of the major chains in the area. She has a strong interest in what is going on in that sector. Erika noted that there could be an opportunity to work with Cindy Hollinsworth on some of the systems work the Health Department is doing with health care. The Health Department is working with partners to

	<p>try to address workforce shortages and also has requested funding from the state for a health care liaison position which could be really helpful as we figure out these complicated systems issues.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vesla has been thinking about the strategic plan and interest in citizen input and engagement. She's wondering how the Health Department has collected that information. There were specific ways citizen input was collected for Healthy Whatcom and is interested in exploring some broader issues around community engagement and possibly a citizen public advocate position for the city and county like they have in Snohomish. That might not specifically be for public health, but looking at the strategic plan, it could be useful. • Steve noted that this brings up something PHAB has been grappling with for the past year and half or so - figuring out how to engage the community as PHAB members so the community knows what we do, how to engage with us, what our powers and capacity are, and understands our complex political structure within Whatcom County. Sometimes the community thinks we're the Health Board and other parts of the community don't know we exist. Figuring out how to engage the community is important and a conversation we should continue to have. • Emily asked what would happen next with the work plan. Steve noted that he will take this feedback and come back with some specific ideas, breaking out some possible paths forward and roles PHAB members could take.
<p>2023 Legislative Agenda</p>	<p>Erika called attention to the joint legislative agendas in the packet. The first is from the City of Bellingham/Port of Bellingham/Whatcom County which is still in process. The Health Department has given the County Executive some additional items that we believe are important to include in the legislative agenda, though since it's a three-body approval process, those items may or may not be included in the final version. Those items include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • prevention • seniors • behavioral health • support for the human side of disasters and emergencies from lessons learned from last year's flood. <p>Other bodies with legislative agendas to keep an eye on include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Washington State Association of Local Public Health Officials (WSALPHO), an affiliate of the Washington State Association of Counties (WSAC). They come out with legislative priorities. Erika is the president-elect of WSALPHO, so hopes to be heavily involved in that process, which is obviously much more focused on public health initiatives. • Washington State Public Health Association (WSPHA) which includes not just public health, but health care, academia, etc. They come out with a legislative agenda that we haven't seen yet, but will probably be approved at their December board meeting. • Association of Community Health Providers – it's the human services state association and is also an affiliate of the WSAC. <p>Legislative agendas for all these bodies will all be set in the next month or so and it would be helpful to have a subgroup of PHAB members to look at all those legislative priorities and determine how the PHAB would like to engage in an advocacy role, since the Health Department has to keep a layer of removal from this, and report back at our January, February, March, and April meetings about where things are and whether or not there is any movement in a positive or negative direction. The agenda packet includes the 2022 legislative agenda from the WSAC, just as an example, since the 2023 one is not available yet. There are a few components in there that connect with the Health Department's work. Emily and Sterling volunteered for the legislative subcommittee. Erika will send out an email to the group with more information about legislative agendas and see if anyone else is interested in this subcommittee. Steve noted that at the December meeting we will talk more about subcommittee work for 2023.</p>
<p>Meeting evaluation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lindsey – I'm excited about the new members – welcome to all of them. It's great to hear updates about everything going on and I'm looking forward to 2023.

- Les – as a member that is coming to the end of my second term (7 years on PHAB), I reflect back on the leadership of Rachel, Chi-Na, Sterling, and Steve and see how PHAB has evolved from being just about listening to doing. I'm excited to see where it ends up going. While my time with PHAB is wrapping up, I see that where the group is headed is what the county needs and I'm excited for the future of PHAB.
- Shamika – I'm new to Whatcom County and PHAB. I'm very excited about the subgroups and the work we'll be able to do in 2023. Glad to be here.
- Sterling – I look forward to 2023. We'll get to roll up our sleeves and do something other than respond to crisis. I look forward to allying with people who are like-minded.
- Edna – I really appreciated this meeting and so eager to have more members. I am also eager to move forward with the new year and find ways to be more active as a PHAB member. I look forward to new projects or just refining our focus as we have space to work on things besides COVID. I'm happy to be here and look forward to finding my place on PHAB.
- Emily – I'm excited to learn and feel like I have a lot to learn. I'm really excited about all of the wisdom in the room and the folks that have served on PHAB before me and have been able to make really good things happen through this body. I'm really excited to serve. One thing I've wondered about is the timing of the meeting. I would love to be able to come in person and I don't know if we're set in stone at 7 am, but that timeframe does limit me from being able to attend in person. I would be interested in discussing the possibility of a different time. Thanks for having me.
- Steve noted that the meeting time is a constant discussion.
- Christine – Thanks for the warm welcome. I'm excited to learn this new role and get into the rhythm of things. I'm excited to take some time to reflect. There's a lot of good work and I need to hold myself back and be strategic about where to direct my energy because this is all good work, it's all upstream, which is where I want to be. It feels like play to me because this is the good work and I will get back to you all about where I would like to be. I'm excited to get to know you all better.
- Michael – Thank you for the welcome. I want to affirm the observation that this group is more than a listening group. There seems to be thought and planning to actually take action.
- Vesla – I think I would have said everything Christine said, but she said it better than I would have – being excited, but also just needing to figure out how to best support the work here.
- Barry – Welcome to all the new members – thanks for being willing to serve. And thanks to everyone on the committee for being willing to serve. It's one of my favorite meetings, but I will second Emily's thoughts about looking at meeting times. Please take the justice survey that Jennifer sent out and distribute it to your networks. We're looking for as wide a net as we can get for input.
- Greg – I would just echo how nice it is to have so many new faces, and the enthusiasm and the eagerness for people to engage. I do really appreciate the hybrid option to allow people who do have childcare needs and so on to be able to attend. I would also be happy with later than 7 if that works out, but am here for whenever we need to meet.
- Erika – I'm feeling a lot of excitement and hopefulness for next year. I'm really excited to have new members and new energy and capacity to do more. I think there's a lot we can do together and I'm really looking forward to next year.
- Steve – I want to echo what most people have been saying. I keep referring to this year as a rebuilding year and it's nice to be at a point now where I can feel us pivoting from rebuilding back into action and seeing that drive to go forward and really start tackling some of these issues with multiple groups working. It's really exciting and humbling to see the depth of background and experience of our membership right now. I think it's going to be a really exciting year moving forward as we begin to clarify a lot of the actions that we might start engaging in. Thank you all for being here at 7 am.

Adjourn	8:18 am
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Next Meeting	Next regular meeting – 12/1/2022
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Health Officer Update

Greg Thompson MD MPH

Amy Harley MD MPH

November 3, 2022



Whatcom County
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COVID-19 Update

Whatcom County
HEALTH
Department

COVID - Current state



- **WA Cases, deaths, and hospitalizations all downtrending**
 - Whatcom in the Low Community Level
 - Whatcom Hospitalizations slight upward blip
 - not a clear trend
- **US Cases, deaths, and hospitalizations relatively flat**
 - Increasing trend mostly in the Southwest and Midwest
 - Still seeing 300-400 COVID deaths daily
- **Expiration of Governor's Emergency Proclamation**
 - Continuation of masking in healthcare and correctional facilities


Reference: 11/2/22: <https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker>

COVID - Vaccines



- **Vaccines still preventing death and hospitalization**
 - Aug 2022, US COVID death rate in unvaccinated:
 - 6 x the rate of those with primary vaccine series
 - (Age 50+) 12x the rate in vaccinated/double boosted
- **Bivalent booster uptake**
 - In WA, about 10-35% of eligible, depending on age
- **Encouraging flu and COVID vaccines**


Reference: 9/7/22: <https://www.whatcomcounty.us/3427/COVID-19-Data>



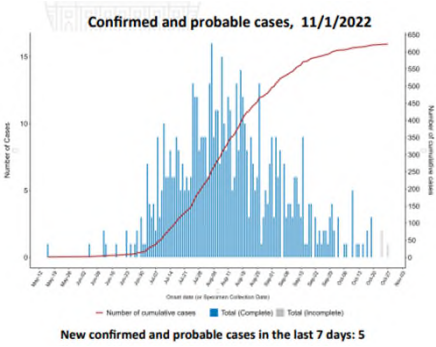
MPV (Monkeypox) Update

Whatcom County
HEALTH
Department

Monkeypox virus – WA State (as of 9/7)



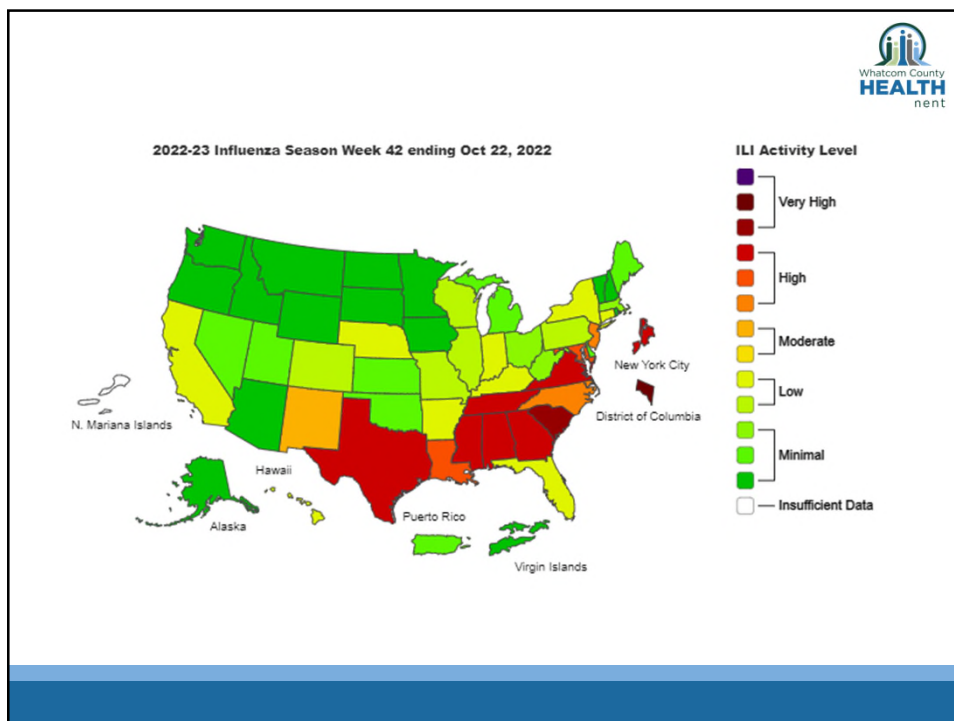
- **Outbreak is Waning**
 - Too early to know if ending
- **625 Cases identified in WA State**
 - 18 Hospitalizations, 0 deaths
 - 5 cases in Whatcom
- **Testing and treatment available**
- **Vaccination continues but demand is slowing**
 - 211 doses in Whatcom
 - 25k in WA state



11/2/22 Source: WA DOH Communication

Other Respiratory illnesses “Triple Threat”

Whatcom County
HEALTH
Department



Whatcom County HEALTH Department

Over 70% of pediatric hospital beds in US full amid surge of respiratory illnesses

Severe Respiratory Illnesses Associated with Rhinoviruses and/or Enteroviruses Including EV-D68 - Multistate, 2022

By SASHA PEZENIK via News
Thursday, October 20, 2022 1:45PM

HEALTH

Children's hospitals grapple with a nationwide surge in RSV infections

October 24, 2022 · 5:00 AM ET

Flu, RSV, other viruses surging in young kids, catching doctors 'off guard'

Hospitals are worried about child RSV this year. Here's what to know.

HEALTH

Seattle Children's emergency room sees unprecedented demand

Whatcom County HEALTH Department

General Message

- **Use all the tools and knowledge**
 - Vaccines against flu and COVID
 - Respiratory hygiene, hand-washing
 - Stay home when sick
 - Mask if ill and you must go out