Public Health Funding and Policy Committee Meeting

December 8, 2021

Minutes

Committee Members Attending

Stephen Williams, MEd, MPA - Houston Health Department – Chair

Philip Huang, MD, MPH – Dallas County Health and Human Services – Vice Chair

Emilie Prot, DO, MPH – DSHS, Public Health Region 11

Jennifer Griffith, DrPH, MPH – Texas A&M University

Julie St. John, DrPH – Texas Tech University

Lisa Dick, Brownwood-Brown County Health Department

Lou Kreidler, RN, BSN - Wichita Falls – Wichita County Public Health District

Todd Bell, MD - Amarillo Health Department

Attendees:

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| Rafael Alberti | Jordan Hill | Lillian Ringsdorf |
| Angel Angco-Barrera | Karin Hopkins | Jessica Romano |
| Michele Austin | Erika Hurst | Jennifer Romaszewski |
| Dana Birnberg | Sharon Jacob | Sebastien Rouzier |
| April Brantley | Barbara Klein | Sammy Sikes |
| Shannon Brown | Sebastien Laroche | Jennifer Shuford |
| Albert Cheng | Glenna Laughlin | Antonio Smith |
| Brittany Cowley | Joseph Leahy | Jennifer Smith |
| Colin Crocker | Barbara Klein | Scott Merchant |
| Alma De’Alejandro | Scott Merchant | Rachel Sonne |
| Courtney Dezendorf | Angela Mora | Carlos Plasencia |
| Becky Earlie-Royer | Susan Murphree | Lillian Ringsdorf |
| Josh Ediger | Elewechi Ndukwe | Shelle Tarbox |
| Nancy Ejuma | Amanda Ortez | Holly Jacques Turner |
| Steve Eichner | Lucille Palenaa | Tom Valentine |
| Tammy Foskey | Timothy Patterson | John Villarreal |
| Cristina Garcia | Sejal Patel | Julia VonAlexander |
| Ricky Garcia | Carlos Plasencia | Jacob Welch |
| Mike Gilliam | Saroj Rai | Rachel Whitaker |
| David Gruber | Shannon Richter |  |

Chair, Stephen Williams, called the meeting to order at 9:25 am and the committee members introduced themselves.

**October 13th Meeting Minutes**

Ms. Lisa Dick motioned to approve the minutes. Dr. Philip Haung seconded. Motion approved and carried. Minutes approved.

**Update on COVID-19 Vaccine Administration:**

Dr. Saroj Rai presented updates on COVID-19 Vaccine Administration. As of October 12th, we have started educating providers on the change that Pfizer has made regarding their vaccine distribution. Pfizer is transitioning out of what has been called the purple cap, which was for those 12 and older and needs to be diluted. They are distributing a gray cap, which will not need to be diluted like the purple cap. Providers should finish up any purple-capped vaccine they have on hand before ordering the new gray cap. The focus is still on getting the public vaccinated and for those already vaccinated to administer the booster shot.

**Update on COVID-19 Epidemiology Trends:**

Dr. Jennifer Shuford updated the committee on the current epidemiological trends in Texas regarding COVID-19. The new variant, Omicron, has been reported in over 19 states. While the data is currently showing that the dominating variant is Delta, we expect Omicron to surpass Delta as it did in South Africa. One way to tell which variants are on the PCR sequencing test is through the matching of data points and looking for a S-gene Target Failure (SGTF). The Omicron variant will match 2 of the 3 data points within this type of PCR test, showing one SGTF, while the Delta variant will match all three. Dr. Shuford also updated on the current flu conditions. At the height of the flu season, the usual rate of positivity is between 35 to 40%. The current positivity rate is 2%.

**Update on DSHS’ COVID-19 Health Disparities Funded Activities:**

Dr. Cristina Garcia updated the committee, reviewing the current partnerships and local health entities (LHEs) that have been issued executed contracts. The Office of Public Health Policy and Practice has created a partnership directory to track and log the created partnerships that now total around 135 partners. This directory will be available after the grant endsand can be used for future activities. Dr. Garcia also updated on the 24 counties central office staff will be working within and the profiles developed to help staff better understand the respective communities within their work.

**Update on COVID-19 School Testing Grant:**

Mr. David Gruber updated the committee on the school testing grant. This is a one-year program that is set to expire in July of 2022. The state has received $803 million directly from this grant. Some LHEs have also received direct funding from this grant. Of the funding given, the Houston Public Health Department received $69 Million directly for school testing. Currently, 940 of 1200 public school districts and 239 of 1200 private schools have signed up for this program. Out of the 940 schools that signed up, 306 public school districts and 69 private schools, have received test kits.

Mr. Stephen Williams asked if there was any discussion about extending the time frame of the grant? Mr. Gruber responded that they have not heard anything about extensions at this time.

**Update on Public Health Information Systems and Interoperability with Local Health Departments:**

Mr. Steve Eichner gave an overall summary of the various IT-related projects that DSHS is currently collaborating on. DSHS is working on a new situational awareness pilot program or proof of concept with the Texas Health Services authority that will make it easier for providers to report data. They are working with Parkland and Knox County with an implementation of the data exchange expected in the first quarter of 2022. Another goal is to streamline the data so hospitals and providers will only need to supply the information once rather than be asked for it repeatedly. They are also working on advancing electronic case reporting that will allow hospitals and providers to report directly into electronic health record systems using an advanced technology network environment called The Association of Public Health Laboratories (APHL) Informatics Messaging System (AIMS).

**Discussion of the 2021 PHFPC Annual Report Preparation:**

The committee reviewed the filed annual report, going over the various recommendations and their associated DSHS responses. Dr. Pont and his team reviewed the Medicaid Billing recommendation. The lead agency per legislation continues to be HHSC, while DSHS is within HHSC, the jurisdiction of this bill and its direction will not fall within DSHS. However, DSHS is happy to be a coordinating liaison to get answers to questions and provide updates. Mr. Williams responded that the LHE’s and the department need to get on the same page with them on what services are covered and billable. We would like services that are provided within the LHEs to be eligible.

Dr. Pont also reviewed the Public Health Provider-Charity Care Program recommendation. Dr. Pont gave an overview on the two current and future funding streams for the LHEs and public health in Texas. This also gave a brief review of the 1115 DSRIP Waiver and its current transition as it phases out.

The final recommendation included Public Health Data and Information Systems. Mr. Eichner responded that DSHS is working and expecting to expand collaboration on electronic case reporting in early 2022. This increase in collaboration is hoped to bring greater access to resources involving case investigation and other data access tools for LHEs Mr. Williams asked about Medicaid funding being used to support some of the data initiatives? Mr. Eichner responded that there is a process called an advanced planning document that is a non-competitive funding mechanism from Medicaid which provides support for Medicaid programs to implement technology projects or resources for the administration of Medicaid. Mr. Williams followed up by asking what level can access this, is it just state, or can LHEs access as well? Mr. Eichner responded that it is a state-level application process through the Medicaid agency, with the focus that this funding stream is on the Medicaid side, not on public health. Mr. Williams would like to meet later to discuss the topic of an advanced planning document.

**Public Comment:**

No Public Comment

**Timelines, Next steps, Announcements and Future Meeting Dates**

The next meeting is on February 9, 2022. A larger conference room (K100) has been reserved for the meeting. Dr. Todd Bell, the LHA representative in the Amarillo Health Department has joined the committee. The committee is now full.

**Adjourn**

Dr. Huang made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Ms. Lisa Dick seconded the motion. Motion carried. Meeting adjourned.

Approved:

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Stephen L. Williams, Committee Chair Date