



**Task Force of Border Health Officials (TFBHO) Meeting  
HHSC Virtual Platform  
June 7, 2023, Meeting Minutes**

Member Name	Yes	No	Professional Representatives (non-members)
Richard Chamberlain, DrPH, MPH, RS	✓		
Esmeralda Guajardo, MAHS	✓		
Shannon Harvill	✓		
Steven M. Kotsatos, RS, CPM		✓	
Hector Ocaranza, MD, MPH	✓		
Eduardo Olivarez		✓	
Emilie Prot, DO, MPH	✓		
Lillian Ringsdorf, MD, MPH	✓		
Arturo Rodriguez, DNP, MPH, CPM	✓		
Rachel E. Sonne, MD, MPH		✓	
Nancy Treviño		✓	partially attended
State Representative Bobby Guerra		✓	
Senator (ex-officio member - vacant)			

**Attendees Present**

Karin Hopkins, John Villarreal, Guillermo Zenizo, Jacqueline Thompson, Francesca Kupper, John Chacon, Dr. Allison Banicki, Sudeep Neupane, Alberto Perez, Mona Croley, Kimberly Lile Dowty.

**Agenda Item I: Call to Order, Welcome, Chair Remarks, Meeting Logistics and TFBHO Roll Call**

Vice-chair Rodriguez welcomed attendees to the Task Force of Border Health Officials (TFBHO) meeting. He opened the meeting at 1:00 pm, welcomed members and asked if any legislative staff were present. He also asked staff from the Office of Border Public Health to introduce themselves. Attendees physically present also introduced themselves. He requested that Ms. Francesca Kupper introduce production staff and initiate the roll call. She provided logistical announcements, proceeded with the roll call, and confirmed a quorum. Dr. Rodriguez thanked everyone for attending and moved to the next agenda item.

**Agenda Item II: Consideration of April 12, 2023, Meeting Minutes**

Dr. Rodriguez asked members to review the April 12, 2023, Meeting Minutes and asked if any edits were requested. He asked for a motion to approve the minutes. Dr. Chamberlain



initiated the first motion to approve the minutes. Ms. Harvill seconded the motion. Dr. Rodriguez asked Ms. Kupper to initiate a roll call vote to approve the meeting minutes. The motion carried and the minutes were approved. She turned the meeting back to Dr. Rodriguez. He thanked members and announced that there would be a change in order during the meeting and asked for Mr. Zachery Flores to provide the legislative update.

**Agenda Item VI: Update: 2023 Legislation**

Mr. Flores thanked Dr. Rodriguez and continued with his presentation. He explained that his update would concentrate on the topics affecting public health. He stated that the present legislative session had closed on May 29 and that a special session was called the next day. The special session includes property tax issues and human smuggling in the border region.

He provided members with a general explanation of the legislative process, including bill deadlines, veto period, and bills passed with or without signature. The first bill he described was House Bill 12, which explained Medicaid coverage for new mothers by 12 months. It's awaiting the Governor's signature. House Bill 1575 has to do with community health workers (VHWs) as eligible providers of case management services for children and pregnant women under Health and Human Services Commission's (HHSC) Children and Pregnant Women Managed Care Program. This bill effects HHSC but mentioned it since it pertains to CHWs. The bill was signed into law and will become effective as of September 1, 2023. Senate Bill 29 prevents governmental entities from preventing certain actions to prevent the spread of COVID -19. It includes prohibitions about school closures, mask wearing and vaccine requirements. This bill has also been signed and will become effective on September 1. Senate Bill 812 requires food establishments to post food allergen information as well as awareness training requirements. House Bill 624 provides exemptions for fire fighters to treat and transport patients to a health care facility in a vehicle other than an emergency medical services vehicle if a traditional EMS vehicle is unable to provide services at the patient's location. This bill also requires each Advisory Council to develop operating guidelines. It was signed into law and becomes effective on September 1.

To provide context more than 8,000 bills were filed in the legislative session. Of those, fewer than 1,300 were sent to the governor. For those specifically related to border health, House Bill 1, which is the biennial budget, contains rider 39, which allows unexpended balances from Senate Bill 8 (approved in 2021) to continue to be used for laboratory upgrades in Starr County. He concluded his update by thanking members and answered questions from members. Dr. Rodriguez thanked him for his presentation and returned to the original agenda's schedule.

**Agenda Item III: Update: COVID-19 Vaccines and boosters**

Dr. Rodriguez announced that Ms. Mona Croley would provide the updated. She explained that she was providing the update in place of Mr. Aragon. She initiated her presentation by



Stating that the monovalent vaccines were discontinued since April 18. On May 6, the Johnson & Johnson vaccine also expired. Since the federal declaration of the end of the public health emergency on May 11, the bivalent vaccines produced by Moderna (Spikevax) and Pfizer as well as the Novavax vaccine is still authorized for use. Looking forward to this fall, we expect for the COVID-19 vaccine to be administered yearly, similar to flu vaccines. She thanked members for their time and answered their questions and moved to the next agenda item.

**Agenda Item IV: Presentation: Texas Association of Regional Councils - border Councils of Government**

Dr. Rodriguez introduced Ms. Kimberly Lile Dowty and thanked her for attending the meeting. She started her presentation by explaining what councils of governments do and the counties and cities that are served by the different councils. The main function is to delivery services to areas that have cross jurisdictional boundaries that may be unique to the areas they serve.

She informed members about the Regional Solid Waste Grants Program, which have much to do with health and safety codes and collaborations with other agencies such as the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality. They also work with advisory committees to identify and prioritize local issues. Most councils include community members and some also include elected officials and encourage community input. They also provide regional training, printed materials, enforcement trainings. They also serve as a gathering place for public and private input to prioritize community needs.

Ms. Dowty also explained that they offer technical and grant administration assistance. She also offered some detail on the Regional Solid Waste Grant for 2020 and 2021. All councils funded and administered 234 solid waste projects. Specifically, they collected more than 636,000 tires statewide in those two years. They also purchased and stationed cameras to capture illegal dumping to help monitor and prevent illegal dumping. She also informed members that the Lower Rio Grande Valley Development Council built a facility for residents to drop off recyclable items. The Rio Grande Council of Governments funded a scrap dollar collection program to help mitigate illegal tire dumping. She presented other services that border councils of government provided to the community. She also mentioned that the councils are extremely unique to cater services to the areas they serve and that they each foster community engagement and input to better serve the issues that are important to residents. She concluded her presentation and answered questions from members.

Dr. Rodriguez specifically asked if councils of governments include public health representation as part of their councils. She encouraged members to reach out to local councils so that public health officials can get more involved with them as well as providing members' contact information for the border councils of governments. Mr. Villarreal reminded members that this meeting was the first step in developing a relationship with different councils. He explained that there was an interest in having TFBHO members get more involved with local councils of governments and perhaps meeting once per year with TFBHO members.



Dr. Rodriguez thanked Ms. Dowty and announced that they'd take a 10-minute break commencing at 2:16 pm. The meeting reconvened at 2:26 pm. Ms. Kupper initiated a roll call and turned the meeting back to Dr. Rodriguez

**Agenda Item V: Presentation: Border Epidemiological Update**

Dr. Rodriguez announced that Dr. Allison Banicki would provide an epidemiological update. She thanked him and initiated her overview of Texas border health. She explained that this was a continuance of the partial update she provided last fall. She informed members of the need's comparison from border to non-border populations, including the lack of health insurance compared to the shortage of health care professionals, the need for dentists and primary care physicians compared to larger cities. She also covered chronic disease disparities. She also noted that it's quite the opposite for community health workers. There are more than twice as many per population along the border compared to non-border areas. The topic of mental health was also covered, noting the need for therapists and licensed counselors for chemical dependency issues. In fact, psychologists and psychiatrists were also in higher supply in larger, non-border cities compared to the lack of such professionals in border areas. Dr. Rodriguez thanked Dr. Banicki for her presentation and asked members for their feedback.

Dr. Rodriguez stated that there is a need to advocate for funding needs to support infrastructure that's obviously very lacking. Dr. Chamberlain stated that the metrics provided showed that we are ahead in at least in one category, community health workers, which shows our commitment to our families and the communities we are involved with, ensuring that there's access to public health, foundational services, and programs. However, the city of Laredo doesn't have any psychiatrists. He also expressed that, regarding diabetes, Laredo is almost double the national standard at 16 percent, when compared to the national rate of 9 percent. Members agreed that from a recent community health needs assessment, there is clearly a lack of health insurance and primary and specialty care professionals. Dr. Rodriguez thanked Dr. Banicki and let members know that they should reference this presentation when thinking of the next recommendations report.

**Agenda Item VII: Update: Timeline of 2024 Reports**

Dr. Rodriguez noted that agenda item six was covered earlier, so he welcomed Mr. Villarreal to share his update. He thanked Dr. Rodriguez and explained that the timeline was meant to alert member of the next recommendations report. He informed them that they were six short months away from drafting an outline, nine months away from a first draft and 12 months away from the submission deadline. He detailed the rest of the timeline and asked members if they wanted to follow the same type of schedule as we did for last year,



according to the dates set forth by the Texas Association of City and County Health Officials (TACCHO). If so, that would set the proposed 2024 TFBHO dates as:

Wednesday, February 14

Wednesday, April 10

Wednesday, June 12 (\*later changed to Thursday, June 13 due to availability of ACCO)

Wednesday, August 14

Wednesday, October 9

Wednesday, December 11.

Mr. Villarreal continued by stating that all the dates (except June 13) fell on Wednesdays to allow members to attend the TACCHO meetings on the Thursdays that follow each of those dates. Dr. Rodriguez noted that it was crucially important to secure the dates so that meeting rooms can be reserved. Mr. Villarreal agreed and reminded members that only three rooms on campus can handle webcasting capacity. Dr. Rodriguez requested that he reserve the rooms for next year's meetings.

Dr. Prot reminded members that last year they met in person to divide the work among each member for the recommendations report. Dr. Rodriguez thanked her and agreed that an in-person meeting to start the recommendations report writing process would be a good idea. Mr. Villarreal reminded members to communicate all meeting date needs to Guillermo Zenizo Lindsey.

**Agenda Item VII: Discussion: Subcommittee Reporting**

Dr. Rodriguez admitted that he and Chair Olivarez were not able to establish consistent subcommittee meetings. Ms. Hopkins asked if there might be a change in subcommittee chairs. Dr. Rodriguez asked members to let him know if anyone was interested in leading a subcommittee. He thanked everyone and moved to the next agenda item.

**Agenda Item VIII: South Texas Binational Conference**

Dr. Rodriguez asked Mr. Alberto Perez to update members on the 10<sup>th</sup> Annual Binational Conference. He expressed that the conference went very well and looked forward to partnership collaboration for future events. He also stated that he's looking forward to adding more continuing education units. He stated noted that there were four binational health council representatives from the state of Tamaulipas including members from Matamoros, Reynosa, Miguel Aleman y Camargo, and Nuevo Laredo. Officials from the neighboring state of Tamaulipas provide a presentation on binational cases. The US Health Attaché to Mexico and the interim US-Mexico Border Health Commission Director provided a presentation. He also mentioned that the conference was attended by about 100 people, about one-quarter of them being community health workers or instructors. Some of the topics included other border health themes discussed in TFBHO meetings. Although it was the first time the conference wasn't held in Laredo, it was still a successful conference and he expects the conference to take place in different locales every year, including Laredo.



Dr. Rodriguez thanked Mr. Perez and returned to close agenda item eight. Mr. Villarreal reminded members that the two overarching border public health priorities were Public Health Infrastructure co-led by Chair Olivarez and Dr. Sonne while the other border public health priority was Population Health, including wellness and diseases, which was co-led by Dr. Rodriguez and Dr. Prot. He reminded members that the priorities include sub-priorities as follows:

Public Health Infrastructure

- \* Environmental Health
- \* Binational Initiatives
- \* Health Information Exchange
- \* Human Resource Infrastructure

Population Health (wellness and diseases)

- \* Communicable Diseases
- \* High Morbidity and Mortality (diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, obesity, etc.)
- \* Maternal Child Health
- \* Community Mental Health

Any changes in leadership should be communicated to Guillermo Zenizo Lindsey. Ms. Hopkins informed members that Dr. Sonne would be leaving her post in July so someone else would have to take her place. Dr. Rodriguez thanked Mr. Villarreal and Ms. Hopkins.

**Agenda Item IX: Public Comment**

Dr. Rodriguez asked Ms. Kupper if any public comments were submitted. She confirmed that no public comments were submitted for this meeting.

**Agenda Item X: Closing remarks, thank you and adjourn**

Dr. Rodriguez thanked everyone for attending the meeting and highlighted how dynamic the border really is. He reminded members that it's their responsibility to showcase this along with needs to the commissioner of health in the recommendations report. Along with his closing remarks, he thanked Mr. Villarreal for his service throughout the years and welcoming Mr. Zenizo Lindsey as he takes over those coordination duties.

Mr. Villarreal added a comment to inform members that he and Ms. Hopkins followed through with the request from the last meeting regarding the Texas Department of Agriculture's promotion of the border-related test/license for mosquito spraying. They admitted that, based on career path, they do promote the standard test as opposed to the one that's only a border-related mosquito spraying test because if someone leaves the border area and starts working in another part of Texas, that license is null and void. Initially they promoted the border-related test because they had a grant to do so. However, the grant had since expired, so they will do what they can to promote that test as well. They confirmed they'd still provide the training prior to testing.

Ms. Guajardo thanked Mr. Villarreal for following up on this topic. She thanked everyone for the collaborative response on the fungal meningitis outbreak. It's been a true exercise in binational coordination, and it's shed light on the public health situation. She also reminded member about June 13 as "blue tie day" to symbolize men's health. She also expressed a



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heartfelt thank you and goodbye to John for his service to this task force since its inception. He thanked Ms. Guajardo for her kind words.

Dr. Rodriguez also reminded members that the August meeting will be Mr. Olivarez's last meeting as chair of this task force and acknowledged his and Ms. Guajardo's work throughout the years. He thanked members for their attendance and adjourned the meeting at 3:34 p.m.