



# **Report on Actions Taken by the Task Force of Border Health Officials**

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**As Required by  
Texas Health and Safety Code,  
Section 120.101(d)**



**TEXAS**  
Health and Human  
Services

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Texas Department of  
State Health Services

**September 2024**

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# Introduction

[Texas Health and Safety Code, Chapter 120](#), establishes the Task Force of Border Health Officials (Task Force) to advise the Department of State Health Services (DSHS) on:

- Policy priorities addressing major issues affecting the border region residents' health and health conditions;
- Raising public awareness of the issues; and
- Other health issues impacting the border region as determined by the DSHS Commissioner.

The Task Force has 14 members. [Appendix A](#) has a full list of members. The variety of Task Force membership ensures representation from the diverse communities along the border.

A report detailing the actions taken by the Task Force is due no later than September 1 of each even-numbered year. [The 2022 Report on Actions Taken by the Task Force of Border Health Offices](#) is available online. This report covers the actions taken by the Task Force from August 2022 through July 2024.

## Actions Taken by the Task Force

The Task Force's primary actions within the timeframe covered by this report have been to hold public meetings and subcommittee meetings and to prepare and issue required reports.

## Projects and Activities

The Task Force meets at least quarterly. From August 2022 through July 2024, the Task Force convened with a quorum 11 times.<sup>1</sup> For detailed information about the Task Force meetings including agendas, presentations, and videos visit the [Task Force website](#).

[Health and Safety Code, Section 120.053\(1\)\(B\)](#), specifies that the Task Force membership includes representation from each municipality in the border region that has a sister city in Mexico. During 2023, two new health departments formed that met the definition of Task Force membership. As a result, DSHS added the health department directors for the City of Mission and the City of Pharr to the Task Force's membership.

## Reports

In September 2022, the Task Force issued a recommendations report, which was due November 1, 2022. The report is available at <https://www.dshs.texas.gov/sites/default/files/legislative/2022-Reports/Task-Force-Border-Health-Officials-Recommendations-Report.pdf>. The next Task Force report is due November 1, 2024.

## Funding

Per [Texas Health and Safety Code \(HSC\), Section 120.052](#), the Office of Border Public Health provides staff support to the Task Force and any other assistance as needed or required by the Task Force, if practicable. The Office of Border Public Health supports the Task Force with in-kind administrative support, including meeting preparation, planning, research, follow-up support, and data collection. DSHS expended no other funding related to the Task Force's activities.

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<sup>1</sup> For meeting agendas and minutes, see <https://www.dshs.texas.gov/borderhealth/Task-Force-of-Border-Health-Officials.shtm>

## Recommendations for Legislation

[HSC 12.072](#) requires DSHS to develop rapid local and regional response and support plans for vector-borne and zoonotic disease control and disaster-related activities. Zoonotic diseases are those that can be spread from animals to humans. In line with statute, DSHS developed a plan to enhance vector-borne and zoonotic disease activities, including:

- Disasters after a flooding event;
- Preventing mosquito-borne disease outbreaks; and
- Improving community resiliency after natural disasters.

The final document includes sections specific to border regions and may be found at the following link: [2023 Support and Response Plan for Mosquito-Borne Diseases along the U.S.-Mexico Border Region of Texas.](#)

DSHS collaborated with local health departments throughout the planning process. The Task Force reviewed the draft and provided suggestions before the plan was published. DSHS published the plan in May 2023 and it will be updated every four years. The document serves as a resource for lawmakers.

## Conclusion

The Task Force continues to study and make recommendations relating to the health problems, conditions, challenges, and needs of the population in the border region. The Task Force remains focused on policy priorities to:

- Address major issues affecting the border region residents' health and health conditions;
- Public awareness of the issues; and
- Other health issues impacting the border region and providing recommendations for long- and short-term plans.

# Appendix A. Task Force of Border Health Officials Members

Members	Task Force Positions/Title
Arturo Rodriguez, DNP, MPH, CPM	Chair/Health, Wellness and Animal Services Department Director, City of Brownsville
Hector Ocaranza, MD, MPH	Vice-Chair/Department of Public Health Interim Director, City of El Paso (through August 2024)
Veerinder Taneja, MBBS, MPH	Vice-Chair/Department of Public Health Director, City of El Paso (current)
Richard Chamberlain, DrPH, MPH, RS	Member/Public Health Department Director, City of Laredo
Esmeralda Guajardo, MAHS	Member/Health Administrator, Cameron County Public Health
Cynthia A. Gutiérrez, MD	Member/Public Health Department Director, City of Pharr
Shannon Harvill	Member/Environmental Health Director, City of Harlingen
Steven M. Kotsatos, RS, CPM	Member/Environmental Health, Vector and Animal Control Director, City of Mission
Eduardo Olivarez	Member/Health and Human Services Chief Administrative Officer, Hidalgo County
Nancy P. Treviño	Member/Environmental Health and Code Enforcement Department Director, City of McAllen
Emilie Prot, DO, MPH	Member/Medical Director, Texas DSHS Public Health Region 11
Lillian Ringsdorf, MD, MPH	Member/Medical Director, Texas DSHS Public Health Region 8
Vacant	Member/Medical Director, Texas DSHS Public Health Region 9/10
Vacant	Ex-Officio Member/Texas Senate Representative
The Honorable R.D. (Bobby) Guerra	Ex-Officio Member/Texas State Representative, District 41