Public Health Funding and Policy Committee Meeting

June 12, 2024

Minutes

Committee Members Attending

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

Phillip 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

Sharon Melville, MD, MPH – DSHS, Public Health Region 7

Sharon Whitley – Hardin County Health Department

Todd Bell, MD – City of Amarillo Health Department

Attendees:

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| Kevin Allen | Imelda Garcia |  |
| Cliffton Karnes | Dr. Cristina Garcia |  |
| Michael Comfort | George Roberts |  |
| Colin Crocker | Robert Papierz |  |
| Michael DeLeon | Dr. Saroj Rai |  |
| Steve Eichner | Joshua Hutchison |  |
| Katherine Wells |  |  |
| Leticia Gonzalez |  |  |
| David Gruber |  |  |
| Karen Dunaway |  |  |
| Glenna Laughlin |  |  |
| Fancine Mascarenhas |  |  |
| Christine Murphy |  |  |
| Nicole Rhone |  |  |
| Lilian Peake |  |  |
| Carlos Plasencia |  |  |
| Emily Rocha |  |  |
| Sara Mitran |  |  |
| Ursula Solórzano |  |  |
| Evelyn Stancil |  |  |
| Monica Rodriguez |  |  |

Chair, Mr. Stephen Williams, called the meeting to order at 9:01 am and the committee members introduced themselves.

**June 12, 2024, Meeting Minutes**

Ms. Lisa Dick motioned to approve the minutes. Dr. Phillip Huang seconded. Minutes approved.

**Emerging and Infectious Diseases Update:**

Dr. Saroj Rai presented an update on Avian Influenza A (H5N1) to the committee. A technical report was released by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) on June 9th, 2024, detailing the status of H5N1 viruses. In the United States, there have been four confirmed cases in humans, exhibiting symptoms such as conjunctivitis, fatigue, and respiratory infection. There is no evidence of human-to-human transmission. Surveillance efforts include monitoring infected birds, poultry, mammals, and wastewater for influenza A viruses. Recent actions by the United States Department of Agriculture and Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) involve significant funding to support biosecurity measures, testing, surveillance, and vaccine activities to control the impact and spread of H5N1. Additionally, the CDC and Food and Drug Administration have allocated $101 million for testing, surveillance, and other response efforts related to H5N1. An additional update was provided by Dr. Rai regarding the May 1st alert issued for Cyclospora season, cautioning of a potential increase in cases during the summer. In the preceding year, Texas reported over eight hundred cases during the summer season.

Mr. Williams asked if the locations indicated on the map for wastewater testing were the only sites where such testing was being conducted. Dr. Rai explained that the dots on the map only represent those locations that have submitted reports to the CDC.

Ms. Katherine Wells inquired whether the department was also utilizing Texas Epidemic Public Health Institute (TEPHI) data. Dr. Rai affirmed that they are, and Ms. Wells suggested it would be intriguing to observe an overlay of TEPHI data with the CDC’s data.

Dr. Huang inquired about the availability of funding from the CDC, FDA, and HHS for H5N1 mitigation efforts, specifically whether the funding is already accessible and if it will be allocated at the state level or directly to local health entities. Ms. Imelda Garcia responded that there is limited information regarding the funding beyond what was presented in the slides by Dr. Rai. The current understanding is that much of the funding will be directed towards agriculture or provided directly to dairy producers. Smaller amounts are designated for surveillance, with the expectation that these funds will be allocated to epidemiology and lab capacity upon receipt.

Mr. Josh Hutchinson presented an update to the committee on efforts to prevent infectious diseases. Progress has been made with fourteen contracts under the Disease Intervention Specialist grant, and funding from the Epidemiology and Laboratory Capacity for Infectious Diseases grant has been confirmed until summer 2026. Efforts are being made to address operational issues related to fund usage under new regulations, with updates on budget allocations for the grant expected soon. Updates on TB and HIV surveillance data from historical records will be posted on Globalscape by late June 2024. Subject matter expert training sessions are scheduled for July 2024 to promote knowledge sharing and utilization of these datasets during monthly calls. HHS is producing 4.8 million doses of H5N1 avian flu vaccine to enhance pandemic preparedness, utilizing existing manufacturing capabilities at one of their partners for fill-and-finish processes. This initiative aims to ensure continuity in seasonal flu vaccine production while improving readiness against potential H5N1 outbreaks.

Dr. Huang inquired whether STI surveillance would constitute a distinct data set. Mr. Hutchinson responded that it would be encompassed within HIV surveillance.

Ms. Wells inquired if Mr. Hutchinson was aware of a timeline for HIV prevention grants. Mr. Hutchinson responded that they are currently progressing through the open procurement process and are unable to provide additional details at this moment. However, he mentioned that they are in the final stages of internal finalization, so more information will be available soon.

**Data Modernization/Public Health Data Sharing Updates:**

Ms. Garcia presented an update to the committee regarding the upcoming data modernization efforts for National Electronic Disease Surveillance System (NEDSS). The enhancements and initiatives involve a significant upgrade to version 6.0.16, the integration of the Fast Healthcare Interoperability Resources (FHIR) Survey Administrator with tools such as the Questionnaire Builder and Survey Administrator to streamline data collection. The user interface of NEDSS will also undergo modernization while retaining current workflows, with input from epidemiology staff to ensure usability. A Facility Management Module will be introduced to facilitate organization management, and bulk import of cases using CSV files will be possible directly through the NEDSS User Interface. All conditions within NEDSS will transition to a page builder format for enhanced functionality. The U.S. Digital Service plans to incorporate HIV/STD simple reporting by summer 2024, and training initiatives will be revised to include new sections focused on report generation for effective data management and analysis in public health contexts.

DSHS is currently engaged in various initiatives aimed at modernizing data systems and enhancing public health capabilities. These projects include the implementation of electronic submissions for the Texas Early Hearing Detection form, which will streamline early hearing screening processes. Additionally, the department is developing the Maternal Mortality Review System (MMRS) to improve case identification and reporting for maternal death cases, and the Maternal Child Health Quality Improvement System (MCHQIS) will utilize hospital discharge data to support quality improvement efforts. New dashboards and visualization tools are being introduced to focus on respiratory viruses, maternal and child health, congenital syphilis, and quality improvement analyses. DSHS is also expanding data sharing through programs like the State Health Analytics and Reporting Platform (SHARP) to facilitate the exchange of vital event data among local health entities. These initiatives underscore DSHS’s dedication to modernizing health data infrastructure and enhancing outcomes in Texas.

Dr. Huang inquired about the potential impact of utilizing CSV files for uploading in NEDSS on reducing congestion at local levels. Ms. Garcia responded that while this update may alleviate some congestion, a complete transition to only CSV files is not feasible due to federal reporting requirements that may necessitate other file types with greater data sharing capabilities.

**Community Conversations on Health Grant Updates:**

Dr. Cristina Garcia presented an update on the progress of the Community Conversations on Health Grant. Public Health Research Advancement developed a success story worksheet to emphasize the grant’s impact and gathered feedback from grant partners. These success stories will be disseminated to DSHS and state/federal government to highlight the grant’s positive influence on health outcomes, healthcare access, and community collaborations in Texas. Key narratives highlighting impactful activities by the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension, Houston County Health and Wellness Coalition, Texas A&M School of Nursing, Houston County Health and Wellness Coalition and Hays County Health Department.

**Annual PHFPC Report Preparation:**

Ms. Glenna Laughlin presented the committee with a summary of the recommendations for the upcoming annual report, which were discussed during the previous meeting on April 10th, 2024, and deliberations were held around combining and editing the recommendations. Ms. Dick motioned to approve the report recommendations proposed and changes made during today’s meeting, as written. Dr. Huang seconded the motion. The committee voted in favor of approving the report recommendations.

**Public Comment:**

No public comment at this time.

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

The next meeting date is scheduled for August 7th, 2024.

**Adjourn:**

Dr. Huang motioned to adjourn, and Ms. Sharon Whitley seconded the motion. The committee voted to adjourn and Chair, Mr. Williams adjourned the meeting at 11:05am.

Approved:

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Stephen L. Williams, Committee Chair Date