



Report on Actions by the Task Force of Border Health Officials

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

**Department of State Health Services
September 2022**



TEXAS
Health and Human
Services

Texas Department of
State Health Services

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1. Introduction

[Texas Health and Safety Code, Section 120](#), created 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; on raising public awareness of the issues; and on other health issues impacting the border region.

The Task Force is statutorily comprised of ten voting and two non-voting members.¹ Seven voting members are health directors from border municipalities that have a sister-city in Mexico. The DSHS Commissioner appointed three DSHS Public Health Regional Directors as voting members to represent the entire border. This ensures representation for rural border counties without local health departments. The Lieutenant Governor and the Speaker of the Texas House of Representatives appoints two ex-officio, nonvoting legislative members.

A report detailing the actions taken by the Task Force is due no later than September 1 of each even-numbered year. This report covers the actions taken by the Task Force from August 2020 through July 2022.

¹ See [Appendix A](#). Task Force of Border Health Officials Members

2. 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 each fiscal year. From September 2021 through July 2022, the Task Force convened with a quorum 12 times.²

The Task Force has created subcommittees that meet to discuss the following priority areas:

- Border Public Health Infrastructure
- Communicable Diseases
- Environmental Health
- Chronic Diseases
- Maternal and Child Health

DSHS implemented a rotation schedule for the Task Force's chairmanship, allowing all health department director members to lead for two years. Each member will fill the role of vice-chair before leading as chair. The rotation schedule is arranged to ensure the chair and vice-chair won't be from the same county. The rotation schedule through August 2029 will be as follows:

- January 2022 – August 2023
 - ▶ Chair, Hidalgo County Health Department Director
 - ▶ Vice Chair, City of Brownsville Health Department Director
- September 2023 – August 2025
 - ▶ Chair, City of Brownsville Public Health and Wellness Director
 - ▶ Vice Chair, City of El Paso Department of Health Director
- September 2025 – August 2027
 - ▶ Chair, City of El Paso Department of Health Director
 - ▶ Vice Chair, City of Harlingen Health Department Director
- September 2027 – August 2029
 - ▶ Chair, City of Harlingen Health Department Director

² For meeting agendas and minutes, see <https://www.dshs.texas.gov/borderhealth/Task-Force-of-Border-Health-Officials.shtm>

- ▶ Vice Chair, City of McAllen Health and Code Enforcement Director

Previously, the director of Cameron County Public Health served as chair from September 2016 through December 2021.

Reports

In December 2021, the Task Force issued a recommendations report, which was due November 1, 2020. Each Task Force member is a local or regional health director working collaboratively with other entities, including emergency operations centers. The unprecedented scale of public health activities related to the COVID-19 pandemic diverted members from their Task Force duties and resulted in the delay. The report is available at the [Task Force of Border Health Officials Recommendations Report](#). The next Task Force report is due November 1, 2022.

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.

Recommendations for Legislation

The 86th Texas Legislature passed [Senate Bill 1312](#), which included components from Task Force recommendations related to environmental health. Texas Department of Agriculture (TDA) amended its rules in September 2021 to add Chapter 13 of [Texas Administrative Code, Title 4, Part 1, Chapter 7, Subchapter C, Rule 7.21](#), related to Border Mosquito Control. TDA has non-commercial applicator license requirements, including training and testing, to deal with pesticide applications made for the limited purpose of vector mosquito control in border counties.

Senate Bill 1312 also added [HSC Section 12.072](#), which requires DSHS to develop rapid local and regional response and support plans for vector-borne and zoonotic disease control and disaster-related activities. DSHS is in the final stages of writing this 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. DSHS has collaborated with local health departments throughout the planning process.

3. 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. DSHS will continue to provide administrative support and collaborate on the Task Force's development of policy priorities addressing major issues affecting the border region residents' health and health conditions; on raising public awareness of the issues; and on other health issues impacting the border region and providing recommendations for long- and short-term plans.

List of Acronyms

Acronym	Full Name
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease of 2019
DSHS	Department of State Health Services
OBPH	Office of Border Public Health

Appendix A. Task Force of Border Health Officials Members

Members	Task Force Positions/Title
Eduardo Olivarez	Chair/ Chief Administrative Officer, Hidalgo County Health and Human Services
Arturo Rodriguez, DNP, MPH, CPM	Vice-chair/Director of Public Health and Wellness, City of Brownsville
Richard Chamberlain, DrPH, MPH, RS	Member/Director, City of Laredo Health Department
Esmeralda Guajardo, MAHS	Member/Health Administrator, Cameron County Public Health
Steven Kotsatos, RS	Member/Director, Health and Code Enforcement, City of McAllen
Shannon Harvill	Interim Member/Interim Director, Health Department, City of Harlingen
Hector Ocaranza, MD, MPH	Interim Member/Interim Director, City of El Paso Department of Health
Emilie Prot, DO, MPH	Member/Medical Director, Public Health Region 11, Texas DSHS
Lillian Ringsdorf, MD, MPH	Member/Medical Director, Public Health Region 8, Texas DSHS
Rachel Sonne, MD, MPH	Member/Medical Director, Public Health Region 9/10, Texas DSHS
The Honorable Eddie Lucio, Jr.	Ex-Officio Member/Texas State Senator, District 27
The Honorable R.D. (Bobby) Guerra	Ex-Officio Member/Texas State Representative, District 41