Public Health Funding and Policy Committee Meeting

February 7, 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

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

Lisa Dick, Brownwood-Brown County Health Department

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

Sharon Whitley – Hardin County Health Department

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

Attendees:

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| --- | --- | --- |
| Jennifer Shuford, MD | Crystal Biggs-Pope |  |
| David Gruber | Rashandra Hayes |  |
| Becky Earlie-Royer | Noah A Chornyak |  |
| Todd Bell, MD | Rafael Alberti |  |
| Julie St. John | Robert Kirkpatrick |  |
| Brenda Narro | Scott Milton, MD |  |
| Carlos Plasencia, MD | Steve Eichner |  |
| Catherine Troisi | Monica Gamez |  |
| Christina Kubenka | Josh Hutchison |  |
| Dawn Ferriter | Aaron Gaskill |  |
| Aurelia Schmalstieg, MD | Lisa Dick |  |
| Clifton Karnes | Varun Shetty, MD |  |
| Dana Birnberg | Saroj Rai |  |
| Aelia Akhtar |  |  |
| Jessica Hyde |  |  |
| Colin Crocker |  |  |
| Rachel Samsel |  |  |
| Glenna Laughlin |  |  |
| Imelda Garcia |  |  |
| Ciara McCarthy |  |  |
| Michael Comfort |  |  |

Chair, Mr. Stephen Williams, called the meeting to order at 9:00 am and the committee members introduced themselves.

**February 7th Meeting Minutes**

Ms. Lisa Dick motioned to approve the minutes as written. Mr. Stephen Williams seconded. Minutes approved.

**Update on Infectious Disease:**

Dr. Varun Shetty provided the committee with an update on a new tool developed by Department of State Health Services (DSHS) for monitoring trends of major respiratory viruses in Texas. The Texas Respiratory Illness Interactive dashboard will include data on the spread, demographics, and other relevant information of three primary respiratory viruses: COVID, RSV, and influenza. The tool will gather information from three different data systems that are updated weekly on Fridays. These data systems include:

* Texas Syndromic Surveillance Systems for Emergency Department Visits
* The National Healthcare Safety Network for Hospitalizations
* Vital Records for Viral Respiratory Deaths

Each of these data systems requires a different team within DSHS, making it a multi-unit, multi-division effort within the agency.

The Emergency Department Visits tab provides an overview of the general trends observed. The Hospitalizations tab will display data from the National Healthcare Safety Network (NHSN), specifically focusing on COVID-19 and influenza. This interactive dashboard allows users to view hospitalization rates categorized by age group, geography, inpatient status, ICU bed types, and provides the option to download the data.

The Texas Viral Respiratory Deaths by COVID-19, Influenza, and RSV section presents graphs illustrating trends in respiratory deaths in Texas. A combined RSV, Influenza, and COVID-19 report is issued weekly as of January 19, 2024, titled the Texas Respiratory Virus Surveillance Report (TRVSR). Data for Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV) Surveillance is sourced from the voluntary National Respiratory Enteric Virus Surveillance System (NREVSS).

Mr. Josh Hutchinson presented the RSV Immunization update, announcing that Nirsevimab and Beyfortus vaccines have commenced shipping from the late January order dates to various locations. Due to insufficient orders during the previous period, there is currently an excess supply compared to demand, prompting the initiation of open ordering on Monday. The program will disseminate further information in the coming days.

DSHS ceased Abrysvo ordering for the ongoing RSV season on January 17, 2024. The recommended final date by the CDC for administering Abrysvo for the 2023-2024 season was January 31, 2024. Further information regarding the vaccine's seasonality can be found on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s (CDC) RSV vaccination page.

Mr. Josh Hutchinson updated that the latest COVID-19 vaccine, available in prefilled syringes since December, can be ordered via the VAOS platform like other vaccines. While there has been a slight decrease in vaccine administration, there has been an increase in the volume of vaccinations. Notably, the 65 plus age group has shown the highest increase in population from the previous presentation. A total of 1,174,701 vaccinations have been administered between September 12, 2023, and January 28, 2024.

Dr. Phillip Huang inquired about the possibility of examining county-level data. Dr. Varun Shetty explained that while it has been considered, a potential challenge would be encountering small numbers and counts, which could result in unstable calculations and difficulty in interpretation. He mentioned that the CDC offers a similar dashboard that provides visualizations at the health service area level, encompassing multiple counties.

Dr. Todd Bell inquired about the percentage of coverage for the Texas population eligible for the Beyfortus vaccine in the current season. Mr. Josh Hutchinson responded that the information is currently unavailable but assured Dr. Bell that he would provide it later.

**Update on Health Disparities Grant:**

Dr. Cristina Garcia, Director of Health Disparities and Public Health Policy, updated that DSHS is leading activities in 24 counties and funding over 50 local and state partners to engage rural and underserved communities in developing community-driven solutions to improve community health.

A no-cost extension application was submitted, if approved, all contractors can continue grant activities until May 31, 2026, extending the current end date of May 2024. Of the 54 current contractors, 47 have expressed their intent to extend, and DSHS contract management section is working to finalize these amendments.

In the first half of 2023, surveys and interviews were conducted with grant contractors to evaluate the impact of the grant, identify lessons learned, and address ongoing needs and challenges. Responses were received from 49 out of 54 contractors, including 39 local health departments (LHDs) and 10 non-LHD contractors such as state agencies and university partners.

As of June 2023, upon the conclusion of the surveys, 73% of the contractors had implemented innovative programs or initiatives within their communities, and 72% of the contractors have made or are in the process of adjusting their organizational practices because of the grant. Also, 88% of respondents concurred that their organization could maintain the community relationships established through the grant even after its conclusion. A follow-up survey is anticipated to be conducted later this year.

The staff at DSHS continue to make strides in establishing and supporting community coalitions by offering technical assistance in project planning and sustainability planning. Additionally, support is provided through the sharing of resources and capacity-building opportunities, such as grant writing and aiding in the provision of training and health education to communities.

**Public Comment:**

No public comments.

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

Ms. Lisa Dick inquired about the sustainability of the core of public health once the additional COVID funding is depleted. She expressed concern about the local developments that have enhanced public health, as the current level of local support may not be sufficient for sustaining these initiatives.

Commissioner, Dr. Jennifer Shuford reassured that efforts are being made to extend the COVID grants and grant funding wherever possible. Dr. Shuford acknowledged the time limits on these funds and emphasized the need to explore alternative sources of funding to ensure continuity. She encouraged ongoing dialogue regarding funding requests and grants.

Ms. Glenna Laughlin announced that a standing agenda item for Data Modernization and Data Sharing will be added moving forward. This addition is expected to facilitate discussions on resources. The next meeting will be Wednesday, April 10, 2024.

**Adjourn:**

Dr. Phillip 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