



**Task Force of Border Health Officials (TFBHO) Meeting
HHSC Virtual Platform
March 31, 2022 Meeting Minutes**

Member Name	Yes	No	Professional Representatives (non-members)
Esmeralda Guajardo, MAHS	✓		
Richard Chamberlain, DrPH, MPH, RS	✓		
Steven M. Kotsatos, RS, CPM	✓		
Shannon Harvill	✓		
Eduardo Olivarez	✓		
Arturo Rodriguez, DNP, MPA, CPM	✓		
Angela Mora, M.A. Ed.	✓		
Emilie Prot, DO, MPH	✓		
Lillian Ringsdorf, MD, MPH	✓		
Rachel E. Sonne, MD, MPH	✓		
State Representative Bobby Guerra		✓	Represented by Jasmine Owen
Senator Eddie Lucio Jr.		✓	

Attendees Present

Francesca Kupper, John Chacon, Karin Hopkins, John Villarreal, Jasmine Owen, Kayla Kates-Brown, Jacqueline Thompson, Tessa Buck-Ragland, Jennifer Moore, and Alberto Perez.

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

Chair Olivarez welcomed attendees to the Task Force of Border Health Officials (TFBHO) meeting. He commenced the meeting at 1:01 pm. He asked if any legislators or if Dr. Hellerstedt were in attendance. Ms. Francesca Kupper stated they weren't present and introduced the HHSC production staff and proceeded with logistical announcements. Chair Olivarez thanked everyone for attending and asked Ms. Kupper to proceed with the roll call; ten members were present to establish a quorum. Chair Olivarez provided a clarifying statement regarding the February 9th meeting and moved on to the next agenda item.

Agenda Item II: Consideration of March 31, 2022 Meeting Minutes

Chair Olivarez asked members to review the February 9, 2022 Meeting Minutes. He asked for members to review the meeting minutes and requested for a motion to approve the draft meeting minutes. Dr. Richard Chamberlain provided the first while Mr. Steven



Kotstatos seconded the motion. Chair Olivarez asked Ms. Kupper to initiate a roll call vote to approve the meeting minutes. The motion carried and the minutes were approved.

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

Chair Olivarez welcomed Ms. Jennifer Moore, Nurse and Team Lead of the Clinical Division, Immunizations Section (DSHS) in place of Mr. Antonio Aragon to provide the COVID-19 Vaccine Update. Ms. Jennifer Moore began by informing members that the FDA and CDC advised another booster dose for those 50 years and older. The additional booster is also recommended for immunocompromised individuals (12 years and older for Pfizer and 18 years and older for Spikevax, formerly known as Moderna), four months after their last dose.

To date, 43.2 million vaccinations doses have been administered in Texas. Of that figure, 6.5 million have received a second booster dose. Our goal is to immunize as many Texans as possible and to improve vaccine confidence and awareness. Data shows that the age group older than 65 have the highest percentage of being up to date on vaccines. About 30 percent have received a booster dose. Vaccinations continue to prove to prevent serious illness and even death among those who contract COVID-19 or a variant. We anticipate the Pfizer vaccine being approved for ages 6 months of age and older soon. Additionally, the border region is doing a really good job regarding vaccinations. More than 85 percent of the border population is fully vaccinated.

Ms. Guajardo asked a question about vaccine records in the form of a QR code. Ms. Moore stated she would research that and report back to the group. He thanked Ms. Moore and took the opportunity to thank all members for their role during the pandemic. He also welcomed Ms. Shannon Harvill to the TFBHO who represents Harlingen Health Department as an interim member.

Agenda Item IV: Presentation: Environmental Health Subcommittee Recommendation – potential collaboration with the Texas Commission for Environmental Quality (TCEQ)

Chair Olivarez introduced Mr. Garza, Regional Director for Harlingen, and Laredo Regional Offices, TCEQ. He thanked Chair Olivarez and the other members for the invitation to present and proceeded with his presentation. He informed members that Mr. Chavero was handling a last-minute incident but would be available for questions after the presentation if needed. He proceeded with his presentation providing a regional overview regarding investigations and enforcement of scrap tires and related rules and regulations.

Chair Olivarez thanked Mr. Garza for his presentation and asked him about annual reports and status updates of investigations. Dr. Rodriguez asked a similar question leading to collaborative efforts and sharing of reports from a local health department perspective. Mr. Garza answered by stating that annual reports were available, and he looked forward to collaborating with local health departments to strengthen investigations and enforcement efforts.



Ms. Guajardo asked about illegal tire dumping and if it was a problem for all of the state or if it had a higher concentration of cases on the border. Similarly, Mr. Kotsatos asked for assistance when local jurisdictions are tasked with leading related matters without the needed expertise on this topic. Mr. Garza explained that illegal dumping of tires is a problem state-wide, but the border has unique challenges that non-border regions of the state don't experience. He also welcomed collaboration with local leadership to help mitigate and address challenging cases.

Dr. Rodriguez asked about the differences in local vs. state dumping limits. Mr. Garza explained that TCEQ could only enforce according Texas Health and Safety Codes or the Health Administrative Codes but that local jurisdictions can enforce stricter ordinances.

Chair Olivarez encouraged members to contact TCEQ to collaborate and dialogue with their regional offices and their office of border health. He also addressed that DSHS' role on the matter is more zoonotic in nature, relative to mosquito-borne infections. When recommendations are an extension of the agency's reach, it would likely have to be presented as a long-term goal to work with TCEQ or other agencies to address such public-health-related topics due to Zika or Dengue or viral outbreaks, etc. and the exacerbation of mosquito breeding for vector control to help mitigate such environmental project that affects public health. He encouraged members to word related recommendations accordingly. He thanked Mr. Garza for his presentation and stated that members looked forward to working with his agency at a local level.

Agenda Item V: Update: Rapid Regional Response Plan Outline [S.B. 1312 (86th Legislature) Requirement]

Chair Olivarez introduced Paul Grunenwald, State Veterinarian for DSHS. Mr. Grunenwald informed members that he had collected technical documents regarding vector response regarding mosquito abatement guides and American Mosquito Control Association. He noted that the plan might differ depending on trigger events because they differ from incident, public health threat and best response practices depending on certain factors (zoonotic event vs. post flooding event, etc.). He'll continue working with regional staff, local health departments and other stakeholders to write the plan in an appropriate, phased approach.

Mr. Perez suggested this topic as a potential meeting at a future binational event in August for Public Health Region 11. Dr. Ringsdorf asked if other border public health regions could also be invited. Ms. Hopkins and Mr. Villarreal commented that they'd work together to discuss this project and invite members of other border regions as well.

Break



Chair Olivarez announced that they would take a break. Mr. Chacon announced that the recess started at 2:23 p.m. Chair Olivarez re-convened the meeting at 2:33 p.m. and asked Mr. Kupper to initiate a roll call to ensure a quorum was met. Ms. Kupper confirmed a quorum and he continued with the meeting.

Agenda Item VI: Subcommittees Recommendation Updates

Chair Olivarez opened this agenda item and started with an update from Dr. Rodriguez.

Public Health Infrastructure Subcommittee – Dr. Rodriguez reported that the subcommittee met to discuss the health information exchange (HIE) related the recommendation. Members from the Rio Grande Valley (RGV) (covers Laredo area) HIE were present. They continue with their mission to improve data and accessibility. There are still some gaps in membership due to budgetary issues.

Ms. Guajardo provided comments because of her role as a board member in the RGV HIE. She mentioned how the high cost is a barrier, though the goal is to limit that as much as possible for providers and other members. She also mentioned the possibility for establishing a mechanism for providers to report directly into the NEDS system, which will be a benefit for many. She admitted that there are costs involved in electronic data-sharing systems, especially for those that provide data in real-time. There are significant efforts being made to ensure local health departments have access to such a system instead of relying on faxes as some do now. She also shared an idea of RGV HIE partnering with the HIE from El Paso to pursue a border-wide effort, perhaps even growing into a state model with the result of limiting or eliminating cost to providers.

Dr. Chamberlain also commented on how important to have the interoperability of systems statewide. The border can particularly benefit from this data-sharing system. Dr. Rodriguez also shared that they plan on reaching out to the El Paso HIE for a potential presentation. Dr. Sonne also commented on the importance of this recommendation and encouraged the possibility of having Dr. Carrie Bradford to present on what the State Health Analytics Reporting Platform (SHARP). She also mentioned the importance of including the Border Infectious Disease Surveillance, National Electronic Disease Surveillance System (NEDS) and Electronic Health Records (EHR) variables into such system to ensure efforts aren't duplicated.

Ms. Mora commented that they support the El Paso HIE but expressed concern of sharing TB, HIV and other STD/STI and immunizations data because they've not received guidance from the state. At this time, they're introducing a new Emergency Medical System (EMR). Although we're willing to share data to support data-sharing efforts, we're not certain if it's allowed by the state so we continue to wait and learn of their guidance on such data sharing efforts. Dr. Sonne thanked Ms. Mora and expressed she'd follow-up via her leadership regarding data sharing and its reference to protected health information vs. personally identifiable information to ensure success of information security regarding surveillance data vs. clinical data. She offered to continue to pursue this topic internally and report back to the TFBHO.



Chair Olivarez commented that the state is doing their due diligence to update their HIE efforts. He also suggested having a conversation to differential the surveillance piece and the clinical piece with the intent of eventually combing the two. COVID revealed the need to share data in real time or as close to it as possible to isolate potential outbreaks. He also noted how important the clinical side of it was to handle necessary medical interventions. He suggested both short and long-term recommendations to identify what can realistically be achieved.

Dr. Rodriguez agreed that the short-term goal would be to have integral meetings with different HIEs with the long-term the strategy that may require state and local HIE organizations to review policies, including ethical and legal matters. Chair Olivarez agreed and spoke of a unified vision from both the epidemiological side as well as the clinical side of the topic to ensure the recommendation is as thorough as possible. Dr. Rodriguez mentioned that the Public Health Infrastructure Committee will revise the language to strengthen the recommendation.

Environmental Health Subcommittee – Dr. Sonne explained tiered system with a new first level certification for registered sanitarians as a Community Environmental Specialist. This first level allows for the position to assist with related work prior to certification as a registered sanitarian. Mr. Kotsatos also referenced the national credential of a certified food safety professional title. Chair Olivarez supported the idea of this new credential that should aid with the exponential growth throughout the state. Dr. Chamberlain also was supportive of this recommendation to help build the workforce and suggested adding the word “health” to the title to clarify its relation to public and environmental health. Chair Olivarez and other members also agreed.

Chronic Disease Subcommittee – Dr. Prot mentioned that she met with Dr. Chamberlain in the meantime but was not able to meet with the rest of the members. She expressed a plan to receive more input for other subject matter experts to strengthen the recommendation. Because there are different angles to revise this recommendation from lessons-learned and outcomes from Community Gardens to reaching out to Dr. Melendez to gain a Public Health Authority standpoint, to working with the Office of Border Public Health Community Health Worker Training Center to focus on different potential curricula. She plans to meet with such contacts before revising recommendation language.

Dr. Ringsdorf also mentioned that she was meeting with different groups and subject matter experts for future Maternal Child Health recommendations. He also asked Ms. Hopkins about the recommendation timeline. She reminded Chair Olivarez about submitting success stories as well. Mr. Villarreal mentioned that the next two meeting will be on May 25 and July 7 with hopes of the recommendations being completed so that voting can occur at the July meeting. Chair Olivarez thanked the subcommittee leaders and members and moved to the next agenda item.



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Agenda Item VII: Public comment

Chair Olivarez asked Ms. Kupper and Mr. Chacon if any public comments were submitted. They confirmed that no pre-registered or present comments were submitted.

Agenda Item VIII: Closing remarks, thank you and adjourn

Chair Olivarez thanked all members, Ms. Hopkins, Mr. Villarreal, and the rest of the team for attending the meeting. He asked members and all attendees if there were any questions to be addressed. There were none and he adjourned the meeting at 3:36 pm. and Mr. Chacon asked production staff to end the recording.