



**Task Force of Border Health Officials (TFBHO) Meeting
HHSC Virtual Platform
October 30, 2020**

Member Name	Yes	No	Professional Representatives (non-members)
Esmeralda Guajardo, MAHS	✓		
Richard Chamberlain, DrPH(c), MPH, RS	✓		
Steven M. Kotsatos, RS	✓		
Josh Ramirez, MPA, CPM		✓	
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 Stephanie Chiarello
Senator Eddie Lucio Jr.		✓	Represented by Daniel Esparza and Elsa Garza

Attendees Present

Francesca Kupper, John Villarreal, Adriana corona-Luevanos, Alberto Perez, Edith de Lafuente, Úrsula Solorzano, Elsa Garza, Daniel Esparza, Sofia Morales Moreno, Chris Medina, Stephanie Chiarello and Dr. Arturo Rodriguez.

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

Chair Guajardo called the meeting to order at 1:04 pm (she was having connectivity issues) and welcomed attendees to the Task Force of Border Health Officials (Task Force) meeting. She welcomed members and asked Ms. Francesca Kupper to continue with logistical information and virtual platform guidelines.

Chair Guajardo introduced Ms. Francesca Kupper, facilitator of the meeting. She read open meeting and virtual platform guidelines. She completed the roll call to announce that as soon as Chair Guajardo rejoins the call (Chair Guajardo was having technical difficulties), a quorum would be confirmed. Vice-chair Olivarez asked Ms. Kupper if the meeting could continue while Chair Guajardo reconnected. Ms. Kupper continued and introduced HHSC/DSHS and other technical staff. She asked Vice-chair Olivarez to continue with the meeting.



Vice-chair Olivarez asked if legislative members, their staff or state agency staff to introduce themselves.

Agenda Item II: Approval of February 20, 2020 and October 15, 2020 Meeting Minutes

Chair Guajardo announced that she was able to re-join the call and asked if Vice-chair Olivarez could continue leading the meeting because of the technical difficulties she was experiencing. He asked if anyone offered additions or edits to the February 20 Meeting Minutes. Mr. Kotsatos made a motion to accept the February 20, 2020 Meeting Minutes and Vice-chair Olivarez seconded the motion to accept the minutes. Ms. Kupper continued with a roll call vote to formally approve of the minutes. The minutes were approved.

Vice-chair Olivarez continued by asking if anyone offered additions or edits to the October 15, 2020 Meeting Minutes. Mr. Chamberlain requested to have the title of "Dr." removed from his name from the minutes, as he is currently a candidate for such a title. Mr. Kotsatos made a motion to accept the October 15 Meeting Minutes and Mr. Chamberlain seconded the motion. Ms. Kupper continued with a roll call vote to formally approve of the minutes. The minutes were approved.

After the meeting minutes were approved, Ms. Kupper announced that Ms. Stephanie Chiarello of Representative Guerra's Office joined the meeting as well as Dr. Rodriguez from the City of Brownsville. Vice-chair Olivarez welcomed them to the meeting. He asked Ms. Kupper if a quorum was established, despite technical difficulties; Ms. Kupper confirmed that a quorum was in effect.

Agenda Item III: Update: Restricted Use License (Senate Bill 1312 of the 86th Legislative Session)

Vice-chair Olivarez introduced Mr. Dan Hunter from the Texas Department of Agriculture (TDA). Mr. Hunter updated members about the limited-use license for mosquito control in border counties. He explained that attorneys had begun writing proposed rules and will be published for comments. TDA staff continue working with Texas Agrilife personnel to set-up a training protocol for testing. Staff are also collaborating with the testing vendor, TSI, to complete the test. It should be completed, along with the training classes, within the next 60 days. We hope this work addresses the issues identified by Senator Lucio at the last legislative session.

Vice-chair Olivarez thanked Mr. Hunter and mentioned how important this process is, especially when responding to emergency events. Mr. Esparza also thanked Mr. Hunter for the great work TDA has done to make this a reality and how it will help border counties in the future. Dr. Rodriguez also expressed his thanks and how vitally important this will be for border counties. Vice-chair Olivarez asked if there were any questions for Mr. Hunter. Members didn't have any questions and he moved onto the next agenda item.



Agenda Item IV: Update: Multi-disciplinary Response/Recovery Team (2018 Recommendation)/Rapid Local and Regional Support Plan (Senate Bill 1312 of the 86th Legislative Session)

Vice-chair Olivarez introduced Mr. Chris Medina. Mr. Medina spoke about the Deployable Teams Standard Operating Guidelines and how they relate to the previous recommendation and SB 1312. He explained how the guidelines provide guidance for teams that are deployed to respond to incidents, emergencies and disasters by the State and Regional Health Medical Operations Center (SMOC/RHMOC). This guide is not intended for vendors or other medical staffing that is, for example, assisting with the current pandemic. Its focus is on DSHS staff deployable teams. The guide refers to the mission, training, equipment requirements and phases of deployment of different teams.

He also mentioned how teams can be assembled and deployed to support border operations, including Spanish-speaking individuals to assist in any type of event. Vice-chair Olivarez thanked Mr. Medina for his presentation and for the border-related component and asked if members had any questions or comments. Chair Guajardo apologized for being in and out of the meeting due to connectivity issues and asked if the guidelines are only in effect when the SMOC is activated. Mr. Medina explained that the guidelines are for anytime an incident occurs, including when the SMOC isn't activated. He also mentioned how DSHS has responded to incidents of different scales at different times and teams can be deployed to support any mission at any time.

Chair Guajardo asked if there was a plan that details exactly what can or can't be supported or if a process exists for local health departments to request resources. Mr. Medina suggested first discussing any issues of support to their local regional staff who have zoonosis control experts. Then, they'd include central office staff if/when necessary to identify next steps or requirement to support a response plan.

Mr. Esparza asked about the study or assessment referenced in SB 1312 and if there were findings from the study, which could lead to appropriate strategies for a regional support plan. Mr. Medina stated that the question might be more appropriately answered by staff from the Zoonosis Control Branch and is not aware if such a study has been conducted. Mr. Esparza asked that a more comprehensive inquiry be attained from appropriate staff to follow-up at a future meeting.

Vice-chair Olivarez thanked Mr. Esparza and asked Mr. Villarreal for appropriate next steps regarding this issue. Mr. Villarreal explained that Zoonosis Control Branch staff were copied on all correspondence leading up to Mr. Medina's presentation and that he'd be happy to follow-up with them to ensure they report if any assessment has been completed.

Dr. Rodriguez mentioned the use of buffalo turbines. Chair Guajardo mentioned that there were issues accessing some of that equipment due to ample required justifications. At times, we may need equipment due to recent findings without an actual event taking place. When that happens, will such equipment be available and what is the process for requesting it, independent of an event. Dr. Rodriguez also referenced a similar scenario when there is a regional need for local collaboration to ensure needs are met. He also mentioned the drone



they recently acquired and how they want to make it available for any valley city to use when needed regionally. Chair Guajardo expressed that more will be revealed as a result of the study mentioned in SB 1312 in its relation to the regional response plan.

Agenda Item V: Discussion: Identify top COVID-19 Response needs for border public health recommendations

Chair Guajardo started this discussion to outline top priorities and recommendations. Vice-chair Olivarez stated the following:

- 1) Laboratory capacity - A continuation of a previous discussions and the corresponding assessment that may have been paused due to the COVID pandemic. He expressed that we've proven the need for this critical issue and look forward to the assessment to be completed. This will show the public/private labs that are available, including universities, during a large-scale event. It's very important that border-wide lab capacity be integrated into one border lab capacity system.
- 2) Data management - There have been different issues that have surfaced during COVID and how data management is a difficult local operation to handle incoming data from the state and the private sector. Specific attention must be given to this topic because we're still not done with COVID.
- 3) Integration and expansion of testing, including testing within school systems because there are concerns with the reliability of antigen tests. We need to ensure the state has a clear understanding about that.
- 4) Staffing is also a major concern. It's very helpful that the state helps us with staffing of public health personnel, epidemiologists, etc. but there needs to be permanent funding allowed for staffing or at least long-term planning for funding. We're funded through March of 2021 but we're just starting the plans for our vaccination program (tentatively from November until the spring of 2021). This funding must be viewed as a first responder level of funding of a major health event. The state of Texas and our legislators must consider this as a public health, first responder-type of funding, just like fire, police, EMS. It should be respected and given the financial support it deserves.

Dr. Rodriguez echoed Vice-chair Olivarez' thoughts and suggested that the great need to consider our geographic location on the border and the improvement to our data communication with our neighbors to the south due to infectious diseases shared on both sides of border. We've done a good job combatting COVID on the southern border, but we must continue to improve our data communication with our Mexican counterparts, especially in these dire times.

Mr. Chamberlain agreed with previous discussions. I just recently asked about the COAG grant in response to COVID. They stated that they hadn't received that report. Staffing is a big issue with Laredo health. In December of 2021, we're slated to lose about 45 staff members. If there's no renewal after March of 2021, we'll lose the rest of the 15 staff members assisting with COVID. If that happens, our COVID response will be dwindled back to eight PHEP staff members for thousands of potential cases that may be looming in the area. This daily marathon we continue to run has no end point in sight. Having permanent



funding or consideration for long-term funding is crucial. We may not even be dealing with COVID, it might be something else in 2022 or 2023 if another invasive and infectious, respiratory disease comes our way. We must have staff already in place ready to respond, instead of building up during an event. Lab capacity and interoperability of data system-sharing is also very important to ensure data is shared efficiently and safely.

Mr. Kotsatos agreed with previous comments, especially that of staffing issues. Chair Guajardo agreed with the comments shared, including that of binational data while Vice-Chair added the environmental health capacity during an event and altering Texas Administrative and Health Codes to reinforce of how we deal with public health in eateries and social gathering places, including bars to help avoid viral infections in the future. Mr. Kotsatos added that cities should adopt state health and safety codes to give cities more power to track and enforce the prevention of an infection. In McAllen, we haven't adopted it, so we rely on the county for quarantine orders. If cities would adopt them, it would give them more enforcement action and authority. Vice-chair Olivarez asked for Mr. Esparza for his thoughts on the issue.

Mr. Esparza shared information about the statute being broad enough to expand on most of the issues mentioned. The health and safety code issue is something that can be handled locally. He expanded on this point and reminded members of their role.

Chair Guajardo thanked members for their input and shared of her experiences in Cameron County and how funding must be on need and not on population. For example, Cameron County received a fraction of what more populous counties received, even though case numbers rivaled that of counties with larger populations. The funding formula needs to change and shouldn't be based on population, alone. It must also be based on other factors. When it came to Zika, Harris County received approximately \$2,000,000 while Cameron and Hidalgo counties received about \$800,000 and were the only counties with local cases. When it comes to COVID-19 vaccinations, most of the funding may be based on private providers vaccinating patients. However, along the border, we have a lot of uninsured people that will come to our clinics. Public Health will have to handle that issue. It's a challenge to figure out how we'll address this issue if funding will continue to be based on population. My staff are working 14-hour days, and this goes back to the mental health issue that we spoke of weeks ago.

Mr. Esparza shared about similarities and differences among border cities and expanded on legislative support of its ex officio members as well as the Texas House Border Caucus. He encouraged members to continue to identify challenges and solutions to improve border public health. Mr. Villarreal thanked Mr. Esparza and other legislative staff for their continued support and referred to Vice-chair Olivarez' reference to writing a letter to Dr. Hellerstedt of potential recommendations in addition to the completion of the November 1, 2020 Report that will likely be turned in late spring or early summer of 2021 due to the related extension request. He encouraged members to continue to draft recommendations and stated that he'd follow protocol to submit the letter accordingly and include them in the upcoming report.



Vice-chair Olivarez asked members about recommendations and whether to handle as a group or as a homework item. Mr. Chamberlain stated that it would be helpful to include the ideas from local stakeholders. Chair Guajardo agreed with the idea. Vice-chair Olivarez asked members to continue with this as a homework item. Mr. Villarreal suggested that the recommendation be finalized by the next meeting (November 18, 2020) and reminded members that the can collaborate so long as the number of members is under five, which wouldn't be constituted as a quorum. Vice-chair Olivarez requested that recommendations be produced by next Friday, November 6, followed by a conference call to produce finalized recommendations by the next meeting on November 18. Chair Guajardo agreed. Other members also agreed with the decision. Vice-chair Olivarez asked members to produce no more than three recommendations to be turned in by noon on Friday, November 6 to allow ample time to meet internally before the next meeting.

Agenda Item VI: Assign subcommittee chairs to produce Priority Recommendations by November 18, 2020

Chair Guajardo opened the discussion by stating that five border public health priorities already exist. Therefore, COVID-specific recommendations will fall in line with those priorities. Members agreed to collaborate and assign members attending this meeting to lead certain subcommittees. Chair Guajardo and Vice-chair Olivarez agreed to meet with Mr. Villarreal to determine subcommittee leadership for the homework assignment, in addition to members working with Regional Medical Directors and local health department leads to receive the information by November 12 and then meet with Mr. Villarreal to discuss next steps prior to the November 18 meeting.

Chair Guajardo clarified the following regarding border public health priorities/subcommittees:

Border Public Health Infrastructure Subcommittee – Chair Guajardo (lead)

Dr. Rodriguez
Mr. Chamberlain
Mr. Kotsatos
Vice-chair Olivarez

Communicable Disease Subcommittee – Dr. Prot (lead)

Mr. Chamberlain
Dr. Ringsdorf
(Ms. Mora will be asked if she'd like to participate in this subcommittee)

Environmental Health Subcommittee – Mr. Kotsatos (lead)

Mr. Chamberlain
Mr. Ramirez
Dr. Sonne
Vice-chair Olivarez



TEXAS
Health and Human
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Chronic Disease Subcommittee – Dr. Prot (lead)
(Ms. Mora will be asked if she'd like to participate in this subcommittee)

Maternal Child Health Subcommittee – Dr. Ringsdorf
Dr. Rodriguez

Agenda Item VII: Public Comment

Ms. Kupper expressed that there were no public comments registered.

Agenda Item VIII: Planning for next meeting, Closing Remarks, Adjourn and Thank You

Chair Guajardo graciously apologized for being in-and-out of the meeting due to technical problems and stressed about the amount of critical work ahead. She reminded members to submit homework by next Friday at noon. Chair Guajardo thanked all the members for attending the meeting and adjourned the meeting at 3:40 pm.