



**Task Force of Border Health Officials (TFBHO) Meeting
HHSC Virtual Platform
February 9, 2023, 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, MPH, CPM	✓		
Hector Ocaranza, MD, MPH	✓		
Emilie Prot, DO, MPH	✓		
Lillian Ringsdorf, MD, MPH	✓		
Rachel E. Sonne, MD, MPH	✓		
State Representative Bobby Guerra		✓	
Senator Eddie Lucio Jr.		✓	

Attendees Present

Karin Hopkins, John Villarreal, Jacqueline Thompson, Francesca Kupper, John Chacon, Dr. Jennifer Shuford, David Gruber, Dr. Allison Banicki, Guillermo Zenizo, Alberto Perez, and David Torrez.

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 opened the meeting at 1:00 pm and asked Ms. Francesca Kupper to initiate the roll call. She introduced production staff, provided logistical announcements, proceeded with the roll call, and confirmed a quorum. Chair Olivarez continued with the meeting by welcoming Commissioner Shuford and Mr. Gruber to the meeting. He asked attendees to introduce themselves. He congratulated Dr. Shuford as Commissioner and invited her to provide opening remarks.

Dr. Shuford thanked Chair Olivarez and TFBHO members for inviting her to attend the meeting. She expressed appreciation to members for what they do every day in their daily sacrifice and dedication to further public health in a unique part of Texas. She mentioned that she looked forward to working with members as the new Commissioner and appreciate members for their service in providing frontline public health services to border residents.



She also noted budget requests that had been made to bolster public health services. She told members that she had read the most recent recommendations report and looked forward to collaborative efforts to meet those goals. Chair Olivarez thanked Dr. Shuford for taking time out of her busy schedule to attend the meeting and moved on to the next agenda item.

Agenda Item II: Consideration of December 9, 2023, Meeting Minutes

Chair Olivarez asked members to review the December 8, 2022, Meeting Minutes, and asked if any edits were requested. He requested for a motion to approve the meeting minutes. Mr. Kotsatos made the first motion to approve the minutes while Dr. Rodriguez 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. She turned the meeting back to Chair Olivarez.

Agenda Item IV: Discussion: TFBHO priority topics and prospective initiatives

Chair Olivarez skipped to agenda item four as Mr. Aragon had not yet joined the meeting to update members on COVID-19 Vaccines and Boosters. He asked Mr. Gruber to address members regarding priority topics and prospective initiatives. He thanked the Task Force for their great work and noted that the agency would like to figure out how to maximize and help the task force move forward and maintain the relevancy that it established. He mentioned that the Office of Border Public Health had three main focuses. The Task Force being the first, followed by the US-MX Border Health Commission and binational work at the local level. The third focus area is border public health in Texas. Chair Olivarez thanked Mr. Gruber and asked if members had questions or comments to share.

Dr. Prot mentioned how binational relationships in previous years have improved. She also referenced the successes of the Border Infectious Disease Surveillance Program and the Zoonosis Program. Specifically, the bait drop project has canine rabies is under control in border areas but rabies in gray foxes still exist along the Mexican border, noting room for improvement from the zoonotic disease surveillance standpoint and the classification of diseases. She also mentioned Dengue cases, proving that continued binational communication is essential. She also asked about changes in mortality risks since the pandemic that may be different between border and non-border areas.

Dr. Ocaranza praised both formal and informal trusted binational relationships is critical to handle infectious emerging diseases, and emergency response in border communities. Dr. Sonne echoed Dr. Ocaranza's sentiments and continued referenced the overarching priorities of border public health infrastructure and population health. Dr. Ringsdorf commented about state and national tuberculosis rates being delayed and how there has been a significant increase in her region, including drug-resistant cases. Chair Olivarez agreed and shared that many patients may not have been able to take their prescribed medications due to pandemic-related difficulties.



Mr. Guajardo recognized that the voice of the task force is being heard at different leadership levels. She also referenced the need to fix border health issues locally and referenced the continued need for improved local lab capacity and the potential to expand to local organizations. She also expressed the possibility of forming a National Border Health Association and having Dr. Banicki provide border data more frequently.

Dr. Rodriguez mentioned how the task force benefits from border data, especially when looking at city and county models to address chronic disease topics and pivot into a post-COVID world. He also mentioned how to continue public health successes such as some of the best vaccination rates. Dr. Ocaranza agreed and emphasized the importance of strengthening health information exchange border wide.

Chair Olivarez mentioned the prior existence of the Early Warning Infectious Disease and Surveillance Program and its importance, leading to binational efforts at different levels. He recommended to explore its reformation, which goes hand in hand with Ms. Guajardo's comments. He also mentioned the importance of losing bilingual/bicultural medical professionals. He noted his loss of 39 staff to other entities and combining behavioral and mental health to public health. He also noted how important it is to publish border data at a larger capacity. Ms. Guajardo agreed and noted that they are sitting on a goldmine of data and publish it to make significant impact. Other members also agreed and mentioned their support for this endeavor.

Mr. Gruber supported the initiatives mentioned by members and commented human trafficking and the integration of behavioral health and public health, known as population health. It encompasses individual treatment from a public health aspect, extending to community initiatives. Ms. Hopkins agreed to support data-driven efforts and the possibility of also inviting the interim director of the US-MX Border Health Commission. Dr. Banicki also noted that she'd be updating members on border data to highlight different public health topics in future meetings.

Ms. Guajardo asked about ex-officio members. Mr. Villarreal shared that he'd been in contact with Governmental Affairs for a few months and noted that, by statute, their service time is for three years. He reminded members that one ex-officio member is appointed by the Lieutenant Governor, while the other is appointed by the Speaker of the House.

Chair Olivarez thanked everyone for their comments and announced that they'd be taking a 10-minute break starting at 2:23 pm. He reconvened the meeting at 2:33 pm and asked Ms. Kupper to call role to ensure a quorum. Ms. Kupper confirmed that a quorum was still present, and he moved on to the next agenda item.

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

Chair Olivarez returned to agenda item three so that Mr. Aragon can provide the update. He apologized for not being available at his scheduled time, explaining that he was busy with proposed legislation. He initiated his update by addressing what's been in the news recently



regarding the White House announcing the end of the pandemic with a proposed date of May 11, 2023. While that is good news, the pandemic has taught us to be ready for any unexpected turn of events. He explained that he hadn't received any confirmatory information about the official end of the pandemic from his CDC partners. He added that state officials usually declare an end to any disaster. There is a possibility for state officials to end it earlier or later, but he'd keep members abreast of this topic. Once state officials declare an end to the pandemic, it will impact our state registry. It is state law that once the end of a disaster is declared, any vaccine or medication that was used as treatment during a disaster must enter the state registry. He explained that the registry is an "opt-out" registry, meaning that it requires consent. When that happens, it usually leads to about a one third decline in administration rates.

He also mentioned that, as of right now, the COVID-19 vaccine is a free vaccine, regardless of insurance status. Once the end of the pandemic is declared, it will likely be privatized, which means it will no longer be free. It will enter the registry, which will end up being part of the Vaccines for Children (VFC) Program. Under the VFC Program, it will be free for children up to 18 years of age. It may end up being included in an adult program to address those who are uninsured or underinsured and he'll update members when he has more information.

He also spoke of recent news regarding adverse events of vaccines in those 65 years of age and older. He also noted that the Texas border still has very high vaccination rates. They'd still like to improve vaccination rates with second doses of the vaccine. The bivalent vaccine will likely become a one dose vaccine in the future.

Members asked questions about proposed legislation, vaccine pricing, child and adult vaccination programs and eligibility. They also asked questions about back-to-school vaccines and vaccination compliance rates. Mr. Aragon answered all questions and offered himself as a resource to members for future inquiries regarding vaccines and disease prevention. He thanked Mr. Aragon and moved to the next agenda item.

Agenda Item V: Discussion: TFBHO Values list for web site

Chair Olivarez welcomed Mr. Villarreal. He provided a synopsis of what was approved at the last meeting, including the two over-arching priorities of Public Health Infrastructure and Population Health. He continued with his presentation regarding the TFBHO revision of the vision and mission. He also spoke of adding a list of values to the web page in terms of messaging, which has to do with all sub-priorities. Members discussed the three submitted options and concluded that the approved language below would replace what is currently on the TFBHO web page:

Vision – To promote and enhance a healthy and equitable border community

Mission – To identify and raise awareness of binational health issues impacting border communities to enhance border public health.



Values – Creative and practical solutions through participatory leadership of Texas-Mexico border health professionals via:

- Community
- Communication
- Culture
- Collaboration.

Chair Olivarez asked Mr. Villarreal to continue with the next agenda item.

Agenda Item VI: Review: Mosquito-borne Diseases Plan

Mr. Villarreal explained that the Mosquito-borne Diseases Plan is what DSHS was charged with according to the statute initiated by SB 1312 from the 86th Legislature. He offered special thanks to Dr. Grunenwald who wrote this plan after meeting with local, regional, and state health staff. Members reviewed the plan page by page and provided suggestions, which included specifying revision timelines, the addition of a map and other minor edits. Mr. Villarreal requested that members send him all edits within the next week to ensure approval protocols are met. Members were extremely impressed with the plan and offered special thanks to OBPH staff, Dr. Grunenwald, and all other personnel that were involved in creating this plan.

Chair Olivarez requested approval and dissemination protocol update at the next meeting. He asked for a motion to approve the plan. Mr. Kotsatos provided the first motion to approve the plan and it was seconded by Dr. Rodriguez. Ms. Kupper initiated a roll call vote to formally approve the plan. The motion carried and she turned the meeting back to Chair Olivarez. He moved on to agenda item seven.

Agenda Item VII: Discussion: Subcommittee Reporting

Chair Olivarez and Dr. Rodriguez asked for members to send e-mails to reflect time preferences for future subcommittee meetings depending on member availability. The agreed to have report updates at the April 12th meeting.

Agenda Item VIII: Public Comment

Chair Olivarez asked Ms. Kupper if any public comments were submitted. She confirmed that no public comments were submitted and proceeded to closing remarks.

Agenda Item IX: Closing remarks, thank you and adjourn

Chair Olivarez thanked members for their attendance and adjourned the meeting at 4:39 p.m.