

Public Health Advisory Council (PHAC) Meeting Minutes

February 8, 2022



Public Health
Prevent. Promote. Protect.



ATTENDING: Dick Stenson, Sonja Ackman, Larysa Thomas, Madhavi Bharadwaj, Robin Bousquet, Jennifer McElravey, Leticia Vitela, Commissioner Nafisa Fai, Afam Okoye, Julie Scotland, Nicole Bowles, Hemi Pariyani, Ann Marie Paulsen, Rachel Arnold

ABSENT: Andrea Lara Silva, Eileen Derr, David Eppelsheimer

STAFF: Dr. Marie Boman-Davis, Alex Coleman, Vivianna Lindley

GUEST PRESENTERS: Eva Aguilar, Mary Sawyers

COMMUNITY MEMBERS: M Kirschner

Welcome

Jennifer started the meeting with introductions and an ice breaker.

Approve January's Meeting Minutes

January's minutes were reviewed. Jennifer McElravey motioned to approve the minutes. Leticia Vitela seconded the motion. All in favor and none opposed. The motion was passed.

Public Health Communications

PHAC members learned about communications resources for the Public Health Division and the importance of providing timely, accurate and culturally appropriate communications to the public. See PowerPoint for more details.

- Alex shared a video which outlined how bilingual Communication and Education Specialist Eva Aguilar has worked to support our Spanish speaking communities during COVID in Washington County:
<https://www.kgw.com/article/news/health/coronavirus/reaching-out-to-non-english-speakers-during-the-pandemic/283-33407006-6333-40f1-92ba-9cb37460b0fa>
- Community members identifying as Latinx or Hispanic were 6 times more likely to test positive for COVID than other Washington County residents
- A large amount of the Washington County Latinx population were essential workers and therefore at a higher risk for contraction and transmission of COVID
- Created a COVID vaccine campaign in partnership with Centro de Cultural: "¡Adelante mi gente!"
- Contracted with local Spanish speaking media personalities and outlets to conduct COVID outreach in the community
- Washington County has approached the pandemic with an equity lens from the beginning. We produced a COVID equity report in English and Spanish to cover the efforts and accomplishments since 2020.
 - English version
(https://washcomultimedia.s3.amazonaws.com/CMSBigFiles/WashCo%20COVID%20Equity%20Update%20FINAL_2021-9-28.pdf)

- Spanish Version
https://www.co.washington.or.us/HHS/CommunicableDiseases/COVID-19-Espanol/upload/FINAL_WashCo-COVID-Equity-Update-9_2021-Spanish.pdf
- Our one-year-old Spanish Washington County Facebook page (Condado de Washington) has 1.2 K followers, many of which are leaders or work with community organizations and are helping us spread the word multiplying that outreach among a group that did not have a safe space to share information or to ask questions about county's services
- Since vaccines became available our vaccine page has had over 1 million views, unique views 871,000
- Our HHS Facebook page gets a lot of traffic and is a great way to get information out to the community, one recent post about the Langers Farm vaccination site was shared more than 600 times and reached over 134,000 people, another recent post about a new testing site at Portland Expo Center was shared 119 times and seen by nearly 32,000 people

Q: Does Washington County have information in languages other than English and Spanish?

A: Our website does have translation for other languages but not all the documents linked in the webpage are translated and we've heard that for some of the other languages the translations aren't great. This is something we're working to improve.

Q: Were you able to identify which messages resonated more or was it important to hit on different messaging touchpoints? Also, how can we help you advocate to continue budgeting for translation services, and as Larysa mentioned, how to expand into other languages as well?

A: For some things it was really important to make sure that we were able to get information out to the public quickly, so for some things, especially in the beginning of the pandemic it was really about translating the information from English to Spanish and there weren't always translations available from OHA or CDC. As we have moved through the pandemic, we've been able to co-create more materials rather than focus on just translating already existing materials. Co-creating materials with the community allows us to ensure that we're answering the questions that community members have and doing so in a way they can understand. We've been able to conduct some targeted Spanish language campaigns and media events that have been well received by the community. At this point in the pandemic, OHA has made a lot of its materials available in other languages, so we don't necessarily have to do the translations. Similarly, we work closely with other counties in the Metro region and share materials that have been developed. This has been useful for materials in languages other than Spanish. COVID has highlighted the importance of being able to communicate public health messaging but there are a lot of things besides COVID that public health does which we also need to be able to communicate with the public, that is why it's important we continue to build up communication capacity outside of the COVID response.

Q: Surprised that for basic public health messaging you need an in-house translator for each item. Is there a way to share this information across the state so work is not repeated?

A: OHA has done a good job of getting a lot of their materials translated and made them available on their website <https://govstatus.egov.com/or-oha-covid-resources> we also work closely with other public health jurisdictions in the Metro area to co-create and share communications resources. This helps ensure that information being communicated is the same across the region and allows the counties to share resources.

Budget Update

PHAC members received an update on the County budget cycle.

- Preparing division budget request
- Finalizing public health Equity Budget Tool Narrative. The Office of Equity, Inclusion & Community Engagement will summarize and present to the Board of County Commissioners
- Ask this year was to present a budget that kept existing programs and services whole (a flat budget)
- Public Health was able to make a request for some financial support to ensure compliance, including the addition of new positions
- Marie will present in February to Interim HHS Director Mjere Simantel on our budget, who will then present the budget to Assistant County Administrator Marni Kuyl in March
- The Washington County budget meeting will occur in May and have the opportunity for public testimony

Q: Are the higher ups doing work to audit the budget allocation for moving forward?

A: Unsure, can take this question to leadership and find out. The equity tool is new, and don't know if they plan a post hoc application of it.

It was proposed the PHAC write a letter to the Board of County Commissioners supporting public health budget requests. Julie Scotland motioned to approve the letter. Jennifer McElravey seconded the motion. All in favor and none opposed. The motion was passed.

COVID Update

PHAC members received an update on current COVID operations.

- Permanent OHA rules for masking in schools and indoor spaces will be gone by March 31st.
- School districts will have the choice as of April 1st if they want to implement universal masking, and LPHAs will have no authority over this
- If a school chooses not to have universal masking, they do not have access to house bill protections, meaning if someone gets ill due to COVID in the school they can be liable. The house bill only protects them if they follow guidelines from local and state public health. ODE still recommends universal masking
- First shipments of vaccine for 6 mo – 5 yrs will be delivered in Oregon on February 21st
 - We are trying to figure out who will be offering the vaccinations. Providers must sign up, so we are waiting on pediatricians to do this

- OHA has not yet provided clear guidance on what the pros and cons are for requiring universal masking in the schools. Schools are working hard to make a well-informed decision that best supports staff and students
- Talking with schools about how to normalize masking regardless of policies or regulations. We need to be accepting of someone's individual choice to mask. Like leveraging anti-bullying language in the student code of conduct to support masking.
- Some questions being considered in the schools' decisions:
 - Should schools provide high quality masks to students or faculty who request it if universal masking is not implemented?
 - Should LPHAs help school districts continue to promote vaccinations and boosters?
- If a school doesn't have universal masking, Test to Stay goes away and it is unknown if the isolation guidelines change
- We are in the 6th wave of COVID right now, each of the waves have a 90-day cycle (going up to the peak and coming back down), and with each wave the virus is getting better at spreading and becoming less severe. To move towards living with COVID it needs to stop breaking our health care systems
- New vaccines are being worked on as new variants develop
- The latest data suggests we did a good job of preventing extra burden from Omicron in hospitalizations due to COVID

Q: Is there a plan to communicate to the public about the March 31st end date for school masking?

A: We work closely with the superintendents to advise on this. They are working internally right now on deciding if they will continue with universal masking regulations in each school district.

Legislative Update

Due to time constraints, the information from this presentation was sent out to the Council. See PowerPoint for information.

Chair and Vice Chair

We will need to vote to appoint a chair and vice-chair for this next year. Information on the duties was emailed to the Council. Persons interested in the position should notify staff by Wednesday, February 23rd.

Closing

Next meeting will be March 8, 2022, via Zoom.