

# Public Health Advisory Council (PHAC)

Tuesday, April 11, 2023 • 5:30 – 7:30 p.m.



**Public Health**  
Prevent. Promote. Protect.



Zoom Meeting:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/7082128355>

Meeting ID: 708 212 8355

Phone: (253) 215-8782

<https://www.washingtoncountyor.gov/public-health/public-health-advisory-council>

AGENDA ITEM	CONTENT	REQUESTED ACTION	RESOURCES	LEAD	TIME
Welcome	Welcome, introductions, review agenda, approve minutes from March			Alex Coleman	5:30
Legislative Updates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Group receives an update on Public Health Modernization</li> <li><a href="#">SB 916</a> Relating to public health</li> <li><a href="#">SB 953</a> Relating to death investigations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The PHAC will vote to provide testimony on additional legislation with impacts to public health</li> </ul>	<a href="#">OHA Public Health Budget Presentation 3/21/23</a> <a href="#">Public Testimony on SB 5525 3/23/23</a> Public Health Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic in Oregon <a href="#">Part 1</a> <a href="#">Part 2</a>	Steve Hargis, Washington County Chief Medicolegal Death Investigator and Marie Boman-Davis	5:45
Meet the New Deputy Division Manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Folu has an opportunity to introduce herself to the group</li> <li>PHAC members have an opportunity to introduce themselves to Folu</li> </ul>			Marie Boman-Davis and Folu Adeniyi	6:20
Updates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>County's proposed budget will be released mid-April</li> <li>State of the County Wednesday, April 19 at 4:30 pm</li> <li>Volunteer Appreciation Event, April 13 at 5:30</li> <li>Summer in-person meeting</li> </ul>		<a href="#">Budget Committee Meeting</a> <a href="#">State of the County 2023</a> <a href="#">Volunteer Appreciation Meeting survey</a>	Alex Coleman	7:00
Member Updates/Comments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>PHAC members have an opportunity to ask questions, or provide any comments on topics outside the agenda items</li> </ul>			Alex Coleman and Marie Boman-Davis	7:10
Public Comment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Community members can ask questions or provide comment during this time</li> </ul>			Alex Coleman and Marie Boman-Davis	7:20
Closing	PHAC <a href="#">Feedback Survey</a>			Alex Coleman	7:25

# Public Health Advisory Council (PHAC) Meeting Minutes

April 11, 2023



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**ATTENDING:** Rachel Arnold, Lucia Benavides, Madhavi Bharadwaj, Robin Bousquet, Nicole Bowles, Commissioner Nafisa Fai, Afam Okoye, Hemi Pariyani, Larysa Thomas, Michelle Williams

**ABSENT:** Sonja Ackman, Eileen Derr, Ansley Fancher, Annie Paulsen

**COMMUNITY MEMBERS:** Annie Herbert

**STAFF PRESENTERS:** Dr. Folu Adeniyi, Dr. Marie Boman-Davis, Alex Coleman, Steven Hargis

**STAFF:** Lainie Clem

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## WELCOME

Alex Coleman started the meeting with a welcome and introductions to those attending, followed by a review of the agenda.

## APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES

After a brief review of last month's meeting minutes, there were no comments or questions. Madhavi Bharadwaj motioned to approve the March minutes, and Lucia Benavides seconded the motion. There was one abstention, zero were opposed, and the remaining members were in favor. The motion was passed.

## LEGISLATIVE UPDATES

The group received an update on Public Health Modernization bill [SB 916](#), relating to public health, and [SB 953](#), relating to death investigations.

Steve Hargis, Washington County's Chief Medicolegal Death Investigator shared how the Oregon State Medical Examiner's Office and Washington County (and other counties) interact to provide services. Oregon State law requires all vital records (such as deaths) to be recorded and registered. The medical examiner shall investigate and certify the cause and manner of all human deaths as defined by the state statutes, and each county is required to have a medical examiner to fulfill these responsibilities. For more than 30 years, the State Medical Examiner's Office (SMEO), a division of the Oregon State Police (OSP), has been fulfilling local duties for Washington County pursuant to a contract.

In February of this year, Major Alex Gardner, with the Forensic Science and Pathology Bureau of the OSP, informed the Sheriff's Association and the District Attorneys Association lobbyists that the SMEO will stop providing services on behalf of the following counties - Clackamas, Columbia, Coos, Curry, Douglas, Grant, Jackson, Josephine, Lake, Lane, Morrow, Multnomah, Washington, and Wheeler on July 1, 2023. Major Gardner cited severe workforce recruitment and retention issues as the basis for the decision.

Having paid for a portion of these services for decades, Washington County now finds itself obligated to fund this work with minimal notice. Steve explained that this will change the dynamics of how we handle our services to the public. Washington County Medical Examiner's Office (WCMEO) will be responsible for most death certificates, which must be signed by a doctor, and we must also provide cold storage for decedents, for which we have no adequate facility. We will need someone fulfill the role of medical examiner for Washington County, however, it is unlikely that we could hire a certified pathologist considering the modest number of doctors in this specialty and the salary required to support the position. We may be able to contract with a local physician, but odds are that they will have less technical knowledge of cause and manner. This also impacts our ability to gather and track mortality data, such as motor vehicle accidents, overdoses, and suicides, etc.

Currently, there is one legislative vehicle to address medical examiner functions – SB 953. This bill makes several changes to existing law that impacts county operations, but the counties were not consulted in its crafting. Even though the Senate Chair of the Judiciary Committee asked for impacted parties to negotiate a compromise, counties were shut out of the amendment process. The bill is moving to the Senate floor and then is expected to be assigned to the House Judiciary Committee.

## **QUESTIONS**

**Q:** What triggered this action?

**A:** Ongoing resource issues. The salaries for pathologists in Oregon are second to lowest in the nation, and due to the inability to recruit new doctors, our medical examiner's have 3-4 times the recommended caseload. One state pathologist recently retired, and another has announced their imminent retirement this summer.

**Q:** Does this also impact the number of autopsies performed? I tried to contact an independent pathologist to review the case of a friend of mine, but I could only find one in the state or Oregon—and they just moved to California.

**A:** Yes, inevitably it does impact the number of autopsies performed. When pathologists have such heavy caseloads, they must triage by cause and manner. The state office has begun rejecting cases for autopsy that they likely would have accepted in times when they were fully staffed.

**Q:** This issue seems very high-level, with decisions that may have high-level ramifications. Why would the Council's vote count to leadership when we have little contact with these county functions?

**A:** We are unique in how we are organized. In Washington County, the Medical Examiner's Office is under the Public Health Division. This circumstance impacts about 14 counties—the highest populated and the most diverse counties. The state and its counties report to the District Attorney and state, which is unique when looking at systems in other states. For context, Marie pasted the following excerpt into the meeting chat:

*Oregon State law requires all vital records (e.g., deaths) to be recorded and registered (ORS 432.133). The medical examiner shall investigate and certify the cause and manner of all human deaths as defined by the state (ORS 146.090), and each county is required to have a medical examiner (ORS 146.065) to fulfill these responsibilities. For over 30 years, the State Medical Examiner's Office (SMEO), a division of the Oregon State Police (OSP), has been fulfilling local duties for Washington County pursuant to a contract.*

Most civil litigation is not handled by the MEO. In cases of alleged negligence, the State Licensing Board may be called into in civil processes. Most deaths attributed to natural disease processes do not get examined by the state or county unless there is evidence of criminal negligence.

**Q:** What happened during the COVID-19 pandemic? Who certified all the deaths?

**A:** If cases were undiagnosed, our medical examiner at the state would sign-off on the certificates. For those that were diagnosed, their local physician or the hospital they resided at would sign the death certificates.

**Q:** What happens to migrants or unknown persons when they die?

**A:** It depends on the circumstances. Most indigent deaths would be investigated. If the circumstances were suspicious, they may get an autopsy. The current guideline is that if someone aged 45 or older dies of what looks like natural disease processes, they will not get an autopsy. If they have a current relationship with a doctor, the determination of death should be assigned by him/her. If no medical records are available, the state pathologist will determine the cause and manner. If deaths occur due to extreme heat, etc., the decedent will likely be taken into the state office to be examined.

## **Requested action:**

Will PHAC members vote to provide testimony on additional legislation with impacts to public health?

Members responded that they needed more information about the WCMEO and the situation it currently faces before feeling informed enough to vote. Alex offered to provide an argument in favor and an argument against SB953 in her post-meeting follow-up. She also provided the following links to learn more about the bill's language and intent:

<https://olis.oregonlegislature.gov/liz/2023R1/Downloads/MeasureDocument/SB953/Introduced>  
<https://olis.oregonlegislature.gov/liz/2023R1/Measures/Testimony/SB953>

Alex will place all the relevant links into an email with a summary on this issue. She will initiate an email vote early next week to determine if the Council chooses to support this topic.

### PHAC Vote to Submit Testimony to the Oregon State Legislature on SB 953

An email was sent to all Council members on Thursday, April 20, 2023, asking them to vote on the question of whether or not the PHAC will submit testimony to the Oregon State Legislature on SB 953 Relating to death investigations. A link was provided in the email for members to vote either yes, no or abstain. The link remained open until Tuesday, April 25 at 12 pm.

A total of seven members voted on the issues, which was just enough to meet the requirements for quorum.

Yes	6
No	0
Abstain	1

Based off the results of the vote, if a public hearing for SB 953 is scheduled the PHAC would submit testimony to the Oregon State Legislature. A copy of the proposed testimony would be sent out to the Council for review prior to submission.

### MEET THE NEW DEPUTY DIRECTOR

The new Public Health Deputy Manager, Dr. Folu Adeniyi, had an opportunity to introduce herself to the Council, and shared some of her background and accomplishments. Each of the PHAC members introduced themselves to Folu and provided her with an idea of their unique professional and personal perspectives.

### UPDATES

- The County's proposed budget will be released on April 23, 2023
- The first Budget Committee Meeting will be on May 8<sup>th</sup>, and the second will be on May 11, 2023
- A State of the County will be presented by Chair Harrington on Wednesday, April 19, 2023, at 4:30 p.m.
- The County's Volunteer Appreciation Event is set for April 13 at 5:30 p.m.
- Half of the members have responded to the question of whether we plan to hold an in-person PHAC meeting this summer. Alex will leave the survey open for additional responses; please share your thoughts, including where you would prefer to meet (Hillsboro? Another county location?)

Marie indicated that we want to keep an eye on SB916, as it is a *place-holder* bill. Oregon Senator Hayward can attach this bill at any time to any Public Health-related bill. She was able to attach similar bill to conduct an After-Action Report on Public Health's response to COVID-19. It is possible that she may want to take an action response with this bill. It will be important to see what action she may want to take and the kind of repercussions it could involve.

## **Public Health Week Feedback**

- A common theme was, “Can you please hold more networking events for the community?” And the PHAC community?
- “If you hold more community events, please plan some *evening* events, so working folks can attend too.”

Please note that we used state modernization funds for the meeting, so no general funds were used. When we plan the next event, we welcome PHAC members to join in the planning if they have time and interest.

## **MEMBER UPDATES OR COMMENTS**

- Hemi Pariyani shared that she watched a video of Marie presenting to the state legislature on the *Three to Thrive* Modernization proposal. Marie’s passion came out in the speech and Hemi found it inspiring to witness live.
- Marie commented that there will be progress in defining what Modernization will look like in Washington County, in how we organize ourselves and organize our plans. We are working on a higher-level timeline that encompasses all planning—including climate, emergency responses, etc. There will be opportunities to engage. PHAC has requested an overview of data, as well as an understanding of some of the work we do about gun violence, so those discussions will be coming soon.

**Q:** A new COVID medication has been in the news. Does this impact county public health with people who are uninsured?

**A:** Marie also sits on the Health Share of Oregon’s Operational Committee, where she has heard about healthcare offerings, which seem to be primarily through our TB, HIV, STI clinics and mobile van services. These tend to be the ways we encounter our uninsured community members. Our best path forward may be to advocate for our healthcare partners to help bridge the gaps. Where are the gaps in their services? What kind of resources can we support them with to narrow those gaps? We have very limited direct services. If more people are uninsured and the demand for services increase—but we have less general funds to draw from—we may not be able to meet the needs of our community. This is why we are partnering as much as we can with community-based organizations and network of community health workers to help people get connected to services and insurance when possible.

## **PUBLIC COMMENTS**

No comments.

## **ADDITIONAL REMARKS**

Marie currently serves on the Public Health Advisory Board (PHAB). Essentially, it is PHAC for the Oregon Health Authority. Would the group be interested in Marie sharing some of the updates she receives from the PHAB? Several members responded in the affirmative, that they would very much appreciate learning what issues PHAB is considering.

Dr. Boman-Davis took time to remind the group of the PHAC feedback survey, which is always included at the bottom of the PHAC Meeting Agenda, and to encourage them to complete one after some—or all meetings—if they choose. The guests and members of the public are also invited to complete this brief, six-question survey. All are free to suggest agenda items, presenters, or to ask for more information on a subject.

## **CLOSING**

**The next meeting will be on Tuesday, May 9, 2023.** The Health and Human Services (HHS) liaison to Housing, Allie Alexander-Sheridan, will be providing an update on Housing Services and the work in which they are currently engaged. Alex thanked the members for their continued commitment and participation and closed out the meeting.