



## WHATCOM COUNTY PUBLIC HEALTH ADVISORY BOARD MEETING MINUTES

SEPTEMBER 7, 2023

**Present:** Steve Bennett (Chair), Teri Bryant, Sterling Chick, Madison Emry, Christine Espina, Jeffery Hart, Lindsey Karas, Kathy Kershner, Chris Kobdich, Guy Occhiogrosso, Emily O'Connor, Robyn Phillips-Madson, Adrienne Renz, Greg Thompson, Shu-Ling Zhao

**Absent:** Michael Massanari, Edna Revey, Ashley Thomasson, Vesla Tonnessen, Leah Wainman

Topic	Discussion/Outcome
Call to order	Steve Bennett presented a land acknowledgement. Roll call of Public Health Advisory Board (PHAB) Members.
Approve Minutes	Sterling Chick moved that the minutes from the June 1 meeting be approved as presented. The board voted and the motion passed. <b>Ayes: 14, Nays: 0, Abstain: 1</b>
Public Comment	<p>The following people spoke:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Natalie Chavez</li> <li>• Name not stated</li> <li>• Misty Flowers</li> </ul> <p>Health and Community Services Director Erika Lautenbach responded to a question from Misty Flowers about why the county doesn't have a reporting system for adverse reactions to vaccines. Director Lautenbach noted that the reporting of vaccine adverse reactions is done at the federal level through the Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System (VAERS). Tracking by the county would be duplicative and would not yield enough data to be statistically significant.</p>
Health Director/Health Officer Update	<p>Erika announced that this will be Jennifer Gay's last meeting supporting PHAB, as she will be in a new position at Health and Community Services as an administrative specialist with a focus on workforce development.</p> <p>Dr. Greg Thompson, Co Health Officer, presented some updates on opioids and respiratory viruses (slides are appended to these minutes). Steve Bennett asked Dr. Thompson about whether there was any truth to talk about new COVID variants possibly not being detectable by home tests. Dr. Thompson responded that there are no known issues with new variants being undetectable by home tests.</p>
Health Board/County Council Update	Councilmember Kershner stated that there isn't much to report, since Council has been on break since 8/8/2023, with the exception of one meeting about the ferry ordinance. Councilmember Kershner also brought up the issue of School Based Health Clinics (SBHC) and that Council still needs more information about that.

	<p>Discussion on SBHC included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Erika noted that the \$30,000 initiative in question would be for school districts that do not currently have SBHC to explore feasibility of adding those in their districts. The Bellingham School district request was to expand SBHC to include behavioral health.</li> <li>• Sterling Chick is Regional Clinical Director at Catholic Community Services and offered to talk with Councilmember Kershner or other Council members about any questions concerning age of consent and SBHC. He stated that youth ages thirteen and older can access behavioral health services on their own, but still need parental consent for medical services until age eighteen. Regulations about this are laid out in the Family Initiated Treatment Act and it would be helpful for parents to understand the act.</li> <li>• Steve Bennett noted that it would be good to have more clarity on what the funding does. The funding would be to research adding SBHC in school districts that don't have them and to expand the Bellingham SBHC to include behavioral health. None of this funding would go towards setting up a new clinic.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Legislative Session and Priorities</b></p>	<p>Kayla Schott-Bresler, Strategic Initiatives Manager with the Executive's office, along with Health and Community Services Director Erika Lautenbach were on hand to discuss County legislative priorities at the state level and solicit input from PHAB.</p> <p>Every fall, the county partners with the city of Bellingham and the Port of Bellingham to create a joint legislative priorities document, including identifying key bills to support in Olympia. This year Kayla is working to get earlier input from county staff for this effort, and would like to get input from PHAB. The legislative priorities are mainly focused on two key areas – behavioral health and natural resources. The early list of health-related priorities is included in the staff memo in the agenda packet.</p> <p>Erika added that in addition to looking at legislative priorities through the county government, the department also provides input to several state associations on their legislative priorities including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Washington State Association of Local Public Health Officials (WSALPHO) – Erika sits on the board,</li> <li>• Washington State Public Health Association (WSPHA), and</li> <li>• Washington State Association of Counties (WSAC).</li> </ul> <p>These agencies are all supportive of the work of local public health jurisdictions and we support their legislative agendas. We are not involved much in legislative issues at the national level, though larger counties often are. Erika does serve on the board of the National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO), which does get involved in legislative priorities at the national level.</p> <p>Kayla reviewed the early legislative health priorities that have emerged from discussions with Council:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seeking full funding for the 90-day Medicaid waiver for jail-based health and jail transitions.</li> <li>• Seeking funding for behavioral health diversion programs, including a potential prosecutorial diversion pilot and/or alternative pathways for competency restoration.</li> <li>• Ensuring Economic Development Investment funds can be used to support workforce housing needs through technical fixes to the statute.</li> </ul>

- Supporting legislation to ensure appropriate Medicaid reimbursement rates and coverage for care, including at a 23-hour crisis relief center.
- Supporting efforts to bolster the behavioral health workforce.
- Supporting community partners, such as Meridian School District, in their health-related legislative requests.

Discussion and questions on legislative priorities centered on:

- Robyn Phillips-Madson stated that she likes this list of priorities, but was interested in more information on the second bullet regarding diversion programs. Are there good models out there where these programs have worked or would we be among the first? What evidence is there that programs like this work? Also, regarding the behavioral health workforce – how much would we need to do to make a difference in the workforce for our community?
- Kayla responded that the LINC program (Legal Intervention and Network of Care) in King County is a good model we could look at. It's a diversion program for individuals with mental health and substance use conditions who have been booked into jail for misdemeanors and low-level felonies. Kayla also responded that it will take lots of support to bolster the behavioral health workforce and that we would be looking to our partners that work in the field to provide recommendations on how best to do that.
- Sterling commented that from what he has seen through his work in mental health over the years, the best way we can bolster the mental health work force is to work on one of the other priorities listed – working to ensure appropriate Medicaid reimbursement rates. Not being able to pay staff enough is the most pressing issue with the behavioral health workforce and that is directly related to Medicaid reimbursement not keeping pace over many years.
- Shu-Ling Zhao asked about looking at these priorities through the broader lens of social determinants of health and asked about highlights of the rest of the county legislative priorities.
- Kayla responded that most of the priorities revolve around natural resources, behavioral health, and housing.
- Erika added that WSALPHO is working on efforts to appropriately fund Foundational Public Health Services (FPHS) and are likely to fund positions on climate change and life course which will be really helpful with some of these efforts. WSAC is also supportive of these efforts.
- Steve added that housing is one of our most discussed issues and asked to hear more detail about ensuring Economic Development Investment funds can be used to support workforce housing needs through technical fixes to the statute.
- Kayla responded that there was support for using this fund for workforce housing, which it is not typically used for. There had already been changes made in the statute to allow for this use, but the changes were legally insufficient and need to be fixed.
- Erika added that this list of priorities is still in the development stage and PHAB members are welcome and encouraged to engage more. PHAB members can email Kayla with any additional feedback at [kschottb@co.whatcom.wa.us](mailto:kschottb@co.whatcom.wa.us).

<p><b>Health and Community Services Budget</b></p>	<p>Kathleen Roy, Fiscal and Administrative Services Manager at Health and Community Services, presented an updated on the 2024 mid-biennium budget (slides are appended to these minutes).</p> <p>Discussion and questions centered on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Steve asked what staffing changes are expected in the coming year.</li> <li>• Kathleen and Erika noted new positions that will be funded by FPHS in this budget cycle: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ additional supervisor in environmental health,</li> <li>○ opioid prevention specialist, and</li> <li>○ life course specialist (looking at things like aging well and social isolation).</li> </ul> </li> <li>• There are some other new positions coming that were funded in last year’s FPHS allocation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ evaluation specialist,</li> <li>○ equity specialist,</li> <li>○ policy specialist, and</li> <li>○ workforce development (as mentioned earlier).</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p><b>Other Business/Upcoming Issues</b></p>	<p>Steve noted that there are three remaining meetings for the year – a joint meeting with the Health Board in October and PHAB meetings in November and December. Reach out to Steve if there are topics you would like covered in those remaining meetings.</p>
<p><b>Adjourn</b></p>	<p>Meeting adjourned at 8:12 AM.</p>

# Health Officer Update

Greg Thompson MD MPH

Amy Harley MD MPH

PHAB Sept 7, 2023



WHATCOM COUNTY  
**HEALTH AND  
COMMUNITY  
SERVICES**



## Updates – Opioids:



- **Opioid Awareness Day event – Aug 30**
  - Public booth with information, training in preventing and recognizing overdoses
    - WCHCS distributed over 100 doses naloxone
    - Training
    - Medication lock bags
    - Additional naloxone and training provided by EMS
- **Whatcom All-Hands**
  - 2 day summit in June
    - over 300 attendees
  - Author event August 1<sup>st</sup>
    - over 400 attendees
  - Book discussions at Bellingham Public Library
  - Planning additional community education and dialogue
- **Multi Agency Coordinating Group**
  - Kickoff meeting tomorrow

## Updates – Respiratory Viruses

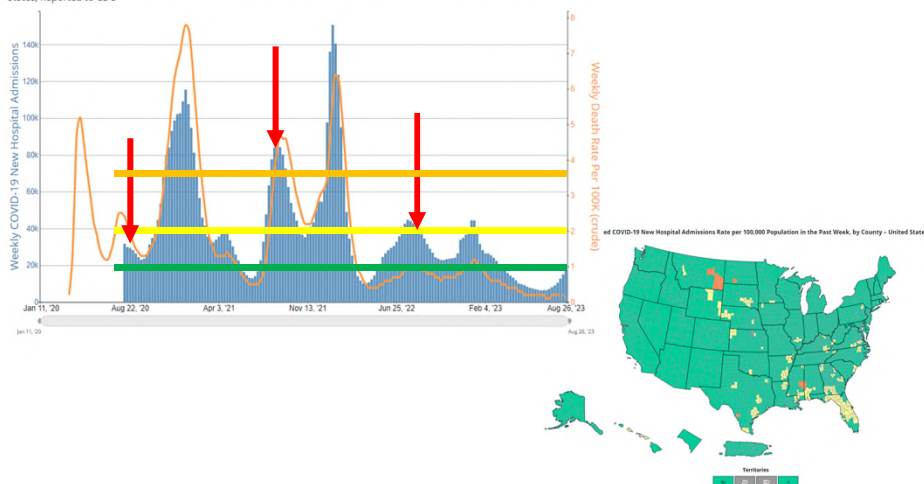


- **Last winter’s “triple-demic”**
  - Seasonal epidemiology of respiratory viruses shifted
    - Intense, early, overlapping peaks of
      - COVID
      - RSV
      - Influenza
    - Major healthcare burden
      - particularly pediatric care
- **What do we know about this year?**

## COVID Hospitalizations



COVID-19 New Hospital Admissions and Provisional COVID-19 Death Rate per 100,000 Population (Crude), by Week, in The United States, Reported to CDC



## COVID Vaccine Outlook



- **Fall 2023 vaccine update**
  - Monovalent vaccine against XBB variants
  - Specific guidance expected after Sept 12 ACIP meeting

## Influenza



- **Clues from Australia** (late winter in Southern Hemisphere)
  - Similar early onset to last year
  - Smaller peak than last year
  - Similar strains to last year
- **Vaccines available now**
  - Vaccine strains overlap well with last year and with current Southern Hemisphere strains

## Respiratory Syncytial Virus



- **Affects the very young and very old**
  - Under 5 years old, each year we see:
    - 100-300 deaths
    - 60-80 thousand hospitalizations
  - Over 65 years old:
    - 6-10 thousand deaths annually
    - 60-160 thousand hospitalizations
- **Activity increasing in SE US**
- **Hinting at another early RSV season**

## RSV immunizations



- **RSV vaccines available**
  - For adults over 60
    - Shared decision-making model:
  - Also between 32-36 weeks pregnancy
    - To protect the infant
- **RSV Monoclonal antibody** for infants and young children (passive immunization)
  - Palivizumab (Synagis) – has been used many years only for the highest risk children
    - Required monthly dosing
  - Nirsevimab (Beyfortus)
    - Single dose for:
      - All children under 8 months at start of RSV season and
      - Selected high risk children under 19 months at start of RSV Season
    - Expected in early October





Health and Community Services

## 2024 Mid-biennium Budget Updates

Kathleen Roy, MPA, Financial and Administrative Manger



Sept 7, 2023  
PHAB

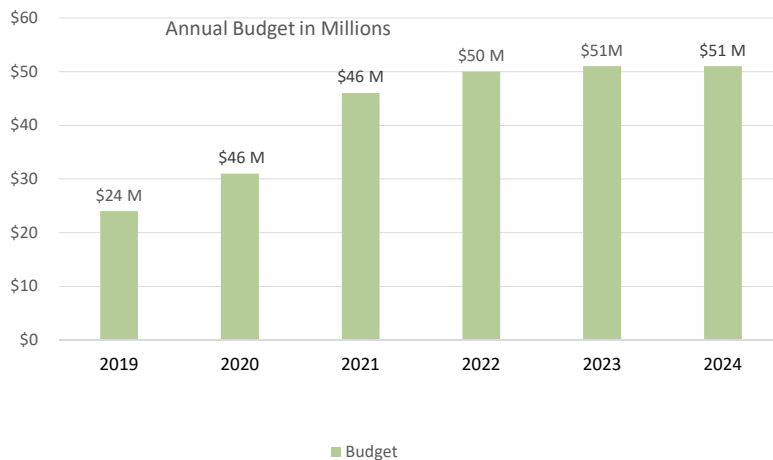
## 2024 Budget Proposals



1. Expand child and family services
2. Increase mental health services for youth
3. Improve public health core capacity

## Health and Community Services Department Budget

*Budget, Whatcom County Health & Community Services | Source: www.whatcomcounty.us/3992/2023-2024-Biennial-Budget*



3

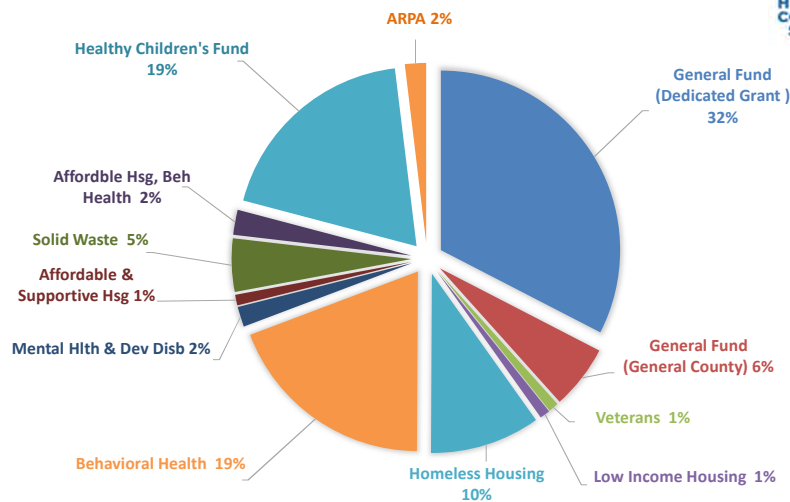
## County Revenue 2023



- Document Recording Fees lower than anticipated (impact on Housing Programs)
- Healthy Children’s Fund new funding 2023 (Levy approved Nov 2022, \$9.9M annual)

4

## Revenue by Fund



5

## Budget by Program



Programs	Preliminary 2024
Healthy Children and Families	8,576,000
Healthy Communities	370,000
Housing	10,900,000
Veterans / Dev Dis / Prevention	6,700,000
Response (GRACE, ART, LEAD)	7,000,000
Environmental Health	6,606,887
Communicable Disease	4,353,713
Vital Records	110,000
Health Info and Assessment	1,341,000
Health / Admin (Hlth Office, Comm, General)	4,813,400
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$50,771,000</b>

6



Questions?