

Allegheny County Board of Health
November 3, 2021
Minutes

Present: Lee Harrison, M.D., Chair
Debra Bogen, M.D., Secretary
Donald Burke, M.D.
Anthony Ferraro
Caroline Mitchell
Joylette Portlock
Ellen Stewart, M.D.
William Youngblood

Absent: Kotayya Kondaveeti, M.D.
Edith Shapira, M.D.

1. Call to Order

Board Chair Dr. Harrison welcomed everyone to the virtual meeting of the Allegheny County Board of Health.

Dr. Harrison announced that the Board of Health held an executive session to discuss matters of personnel and litigation.

2. Approval of the Minutes from the Meeting of September 1, 2021

Dr. Harrison asked members if they any comments regarding the minutes. There were none.

Action: Dr. Stewart moved, and William Youngblood seconded a motion to approve the minutes as presented. Dr. Portlock asked that the minutes more accurately reflect comments regarding disparities related to sexually transmitted diseases. Dr. Harrison proposed amending the vote to make it contingent on that satisfactory addition to that item. The board agreed and the minutes were unanimously approved.

3. Public Comment on Agenda Items

Dr. Harrison invited those who registered to provide public comment, but none were in attendance.

4. Director's Report

Dr. Bogen began her report with an update on COVID-19. She presented data showing the trends across the world, the U.S., the Commonwealth of PA and here in Allegheny County. Dr. Bogen took a moment to address the deaths in Allegheny County.

She also reviewed the data from the last three months in Allegheny County looking at cases, individuals tested, hospitalizations and deaths. She specifically looked at the race and ethnicity data pointing out the differences.

Dr. Bogen shared the Allegheny County vaccination rates by age and race pointing out that the older population, the better the vaccine rate. Disparities in vaccinations by race continue despite the efforts of the ACHD and many others. The Director also pointed out that more people are getting vaccinated, however, it is slow and steady.

Dr. Bogen announced that the CDC has recommended that children 5-11 years old would be eligible to receive the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine and that pediatric vaccines would be available by the end of the week

Dr. Bogen announced that the Center for Disease Control awarded the ACHD a \$7.5 million, 3-year grant to strengthen Community Health Workers' (CHWs) ability to address COVID. This grant will expand the public health workforce and contribute directly to the reduction of public health disparities in Allegheny County. The ACHD will work with local organizations to share knowledge and expertise.

Dr. Bogen then announced that the CDC also awarded the ACHD a grant to improve health outcomes and reduce disparities for the LGBTQ+ people across our community. The ACHD also received a \$4 million Targeted Airshed Grant from the EPA.

The Director reminded everyone that the ACHD is an accredited public health department and is in the process of seeking its reaccreditation. She plans to continue providing updates on that process which will culminate in the second half of 2022.

The ACHD has recently published new reports, including the 2020 Animal Bites Summary Report, the 2020-21 School Immunization Report and an update on lead data.

Following the Director's presentations, board members praised the ACHD for the grants and asked specific questions about the CDC's community health worker grant. Additionally, board members asked about vaccination rates and the factors underlying racial disparities that still exist.

Dr. Bogen introduced Dr. Wadowsky, the Director of the Allegheny County Public Health Laboratory.

Public Health Laboratory Update

Dr. Robert Wadowsky provided a clear overview of the work of the public health laboratory in its six different sites. Each year the public health laboratory performs on average approximately 66,000 tests.

Dr. Wadowsky explained new equipment had significantly increased the capacity of the laboratory. From April 2020 to March 2021, the lab tested 3,051 specimens and had a relatively low throughput. With the acquisition of the Hologic Panther Fusion Nucleic Acid Amplification System the throughput increased significantly. Before the Hologic instrument, there were numerous

incidents in which the number of specimens exceeded the laboratory's testing capacity and had to be referred to the State Laboratory or Curative.

In addition, the public health laboratory has provided training and regulatory guidance to our partners.

Dr. Wadowsky announced that the public health laboratory has received generous funding from the county and federal governments, including four Epidemiology Laboratory Capacity Grants. Dr. Wadowsky concluded with a view to the future of the Public Health Laboratory, including new programs, new services, a regional footprint and a new laboratory facility.

Board members asked questions about the new facility and the need for genomic sequencing. Currently, there is no sequencing at the public health lab, but would like to add that capacity.

Food Safety Program Overview

Next, Otis Pitts, Deputy Director of Public Policy & Enforcement, presented an overview of the Food Safety Program. He provided information regarding the duties of the program, staffing, types of food Permits, safety inspections and the Covid-19 response. Mr. Pitts spoke about the new Customer Service Initiative which will include a website update, the Allegheny County constituent services tool -- GovQA -- and data management.

The Board commended Mr. Pitts on his presentation and asked about vacancies. He acknowledged the challenges of hiring and retaining staff in this period and said the ACHD was pursuing new and innovative ways to share job opportunities.

5. Action Items

A. Revisions to Article III

Following his presentation on the Food Safety Program, Mr. Pitts introduced the proposed revisions to Article III: Food Safety. The last major revisions to this code were made in 2000. The proposed revisions align with the Pennsylvania statutory requirements. For many of the revisions the Food Safety team drew heavily from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) Model Food Code, which is published to assist food safety agencies. The proposed revisions call for a restructuring of the regulations to improve readability. The proposed new regulations proceed chronologically from basic requirements for opening a new facility to the inspection process and areas generally verified during inspections, to administrative proceeding for violations.

Because of the extensive nature of the revisions Mr. Pitts recommend the Board of Health consider repealing of the old regulations and replacing them with the new. The documents presented are structured accordingly. Mr. Pitts requested that the Board of Health approve a 60-day public comment period

The Board thanked Otis for a great job. The Board discussed the 60-day timeline and were concerned that it may be too short because of the difficulty with the industry during the holidays and would like to see the public comment extended.

Action: Dr. Portlock moved to send the proposed revisions to Article III the public comment for 75 days. Mr. Ferraro seconded the motion. **The motion passed unanimously.**

B. Proposed Revisions to Article I

Dr. Harrison invited Kim Joyce, Deputy Director of Administration, to present. Ms. Joyce explained that Article I: Merit System (Personnel Administration) provides the ACHD with guidelines for all personnel activity. The proposed revisions to Article I would provide a regulatory process that is transparent to all, for any employee of the ACHD, except the Director, who wishes to have their appeal heard by the Board of Health. The proposed process would involve hiring a third-party hearing officer who would hear the matter and present proposed findings of fact and conclusions of law to the Board. Once presented, the Board could consider them at its next regular meeting.

Action: Dr. Portlock moved to send the proposed revisions to public comment for 30 days. Dr. Stewart seconded the motion. **Motion passed unanimously.**

C. Resolution to Appoint Hearing Officer

Ms. Joyce then presented a resolution which calls for the hiring of a third-party hearing officer to hear the appeal of a particular employee and present findings of fact and conclusion of law which, following their presentation, the Board may consideration at its next regular meeting. The Board had no questions.

Action: Dr. Stewart moved to pass the resolution. Mr. Youngblood seconded the motion. **The motion passed unanimously.**

D. Environmental Health Fund Request

Joy Smallwood, Environmental Health Administrator with Water Pollution Control and Solid Waste Program, presented a request for \$30,000 from the Environmental Health Fund to provide financial assistance to the non-profit Allegheny Cleanways to conduct illegal dumping cleanups in Allegheny County. The Board had no questions.

Action: Dr. Portlock moved to approve the Environmental Fund request as presented. Dr. Stewart seconded the motion. **The Motion passed unanimously.**

E. Clean Air Fund Request to Spend 5% of Clean Air Fund on Air Program Operational Projects

Jayne Graham, Manager of the Air Quality Program, explained that Article XXI currently allows the ACHD Air Quality Program to draw each year up to 5% of the available funds in the Clean Air Fund to support its operations. Ms.

Graham said that for this year the requested amount equals \$578,684. The Board members had no questions.

Action: Mr. Youngblood moved to approve the Clean Air Fund annual request. Mr. Ferraro seconded the motion. **The motion passed unanimously.**

F. Gasoline and Gasoline Station Regulations; Stage I & II and RVP

Ms. Graham presented the request for final approval for revisions to Article XXI related to gasoline and gasoline station regulations. At a prior meeting, the Board had received an extensive presentation on the matter and after a 30-day public comment period there were no recommended amendments to the proposed revisions. No public comments were submitted.

Action: Mr. Youngblood moved to approve the revisions to Article XXI as presented. Dr. Stewart seconded the motion. **The motion passed unanimously.**

6. Public Comments on Non-Agenda Items.

Dr. Harrison invited those who registered to provide public comment on non-agenda items. The following individuals registered and provided public comment on non-agenda items:

Mark Dixon spoke on malodor in the Mon Valley, Patrick Campbell on hydrogen sulfide, Lorraine Starsky the retention of Health Department Employees, Jay Walker and Matthew Nemeth on Coke Oven Regulations and Angelo Taranto on Metalico.

Adjournment

Dr. Harrison entertained a motion to adjourn which was provided and approved unanimously. The meeting adjourned at approximately 3:00 pm.