

Allegheny County Board of Health
July 16, 2025, 12:30 p.m.
Minutes

Present:

Dr. Joylette Portlock, PhD, Chair
Ms. Laura Dagley, BSN, RN
Dr. Margaret Larkins-Pettigrew, MD, Med, MPPM
Dr. Khlood Salman, DrPH, RN
Ms. Lisa Scales, JD
Dr. Michael Yonas, DrPH, MPH
Dr. Dara Méndez, PhD, MPH
Dr. Graham Snyder, MD MS
Dr. Iulia Vann, MD MPH, Secretary

Absent:

Dr. Elizabeth Cuevas, MD, Vice Chair

1. Call to Order

Dr. Joylette Portlock, Chair of the Board of Health, called July 16, 2025, meeting of the Allegheny County Health Department Board of Health to order at 12:42 p.m.

Dr. Joylette Portlock announced that the Board of Health held an executive session prior to the meeting to discuss legal matters.

2. Approval of Minutes

Dr. Joylette Portlock called for a vote to approve the minutes from May 16, 2025, Board of Health Meeting.

Action: Dr. Margaret Larkins-Pettigrew, MD, Med, MPPM motioned to approve the minutes as presented and Dr. Graham Snyder seconded the motion. All who voted were in favor. Dr. Dara Mendez, PhD, MPH abstained from the vote.

3. Public Comments:

Dr. Joylette Portlock moved to the public comment section of the meeting. Ms. Kim Joyce reported there was one comment on non agenda items from a person who was already a registered speaker so presumably they wanted their testimony delivered in writing (which was the case)

4. Public Comments on Non-Agenda Items

Dr. Joylette Portlock stated that complaints to the Board of Health can be filled in online on the Health Department Website.

- a. Benjamin John Chiszar- Air Quality and Public Health
- b. Maddie Curtis – Improving air quality to retain young professionals
- c. Jay Walker – Air Quality
- d. Matthew Mehalik – Air Quality – Breathe Project

PUBLIC COMMENTS – VIA ZOOM

- e. Mark Dixon – Air Quality
- f. Barbara Pace – Air Quality
- g. Angela A. Taranto – Air Quality

5. **Committee Updates**

- a. Policy and Procedure
- b. Fracking
- c. Ideation

6. **Director’s Report**

Dr. Joylette Portlock passed the presentation to Dr. Iulia Vann for the Director’s report. Dr. Iulia Vann highlighted some of the projects that have taken place since the last meeting. She presented the Allegheny County Health Department Values Statement which serves the county with pride, embodying the following values in everything which include, 1) Respect 2) Inclusivity 3) Equity 4) Accountability 5) Competence and 6) Community-Centered.

Dr. Vann then moved on to discussing Emerging Health Threats and how these important issues are affecting so many people not only in our area but across the country:

- a) Measles: Measles cases have reached an all-time high since elimination. Measles are one of the most infectious diseases and over the weekend, the United States reached 1,281 cases which is the highest number since the disease was declared eliminated in 2000, and the most this country has seen since 1992 (when there were 2,126 cases) Measles have been controlled due to high vaccination rates, however these rates are slipping. High case counts don’t necessarily mean the United States is losing its measles elimination status. That status which is defined by the World Health Organization means that measles is not endemic in the United States. This designation would be lost if an outbreak were to last more than 12 months. Currently, the United States is halfway to losing elimination status thanks to a large West Texas outbreak that began in January. Although the disease has slowed, transmission continues across multiple counties in several states, making it a key driver of the national surge. Historical data shows that measles are usually caught when traveling abroad; then the disease is brought back home.
- b) Medicaid Cuts: Medicaid cuts were passed through “reconciliation” – a fast-track process that allowed Congress to make significant changes to taxes and spending with just a simple majority in the Senate. As a result, \$1 trillion dollars in cuts were made

over the next ten (1) years. Only 8% of Americans were aware this was included in the “Big Beautiful Bill” that passed. There’s also been a lack of plain language explanations. Even headlines like “11 million people could lose health insurance” don’t answer the basic questions: How? Why?

Medicaid provides health insurance for more than 8 million Americans (1 in 4 people) and is paid primarily by the federal government. Individual states also cover costs and set their coverage policies who’s eligible for services, what services are covered and payment policies. It acts as a safety net in two ways:

- For people with low or limited income, pregnant women, people with some disabilities, and children
- For people eligible for both Medicare and Medicaid, such as older adults needing long-term care

Additionally, Medicaid supports:

- Half of all births in the United States
- Long-term care for millions of seniors
- Children with special needs and adults with chronic illnesses
- Hospitals, particularly in rural and underserved communities

Supporters of these cuts in Medicaid often cite “Fraud, waste and abuse” The bill doesn’t directly eliminate benefits, but it introduces major new hurdles for people to stay covered, like:

- Work requirements- This would require some people to prove they are working (or doing things like job training or volunteering) to keep their Medicaid coverage.
- Continuous monitoring of eligibility- People on Medicaid would have to frequently show proof that they still qualify more often than they already do.
- Limiting States the ability to tax health care providers – Health care facilities pay taxes to their state to help fund Medicaid because states’ Medicaid payments are matched by federal dollars, provider taxes can increase how much federal money states receive without the state paying more. This bill restricts how much states can do that, which could reduce the amount of federal money states cut for health care.
- Reducing the federal match for the Medicaid expansion – The federal government currently pays most of the cost for states that expanded Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act. This change would mean the federal government pays less and states would have to cover more of the cost themselves.

Additionally, this bill also directly cuts the amount of federal money allocated to states budgets, so states will have to determine how to fill the resulting funding gaps and this will result in 1) Kicking people off coverage, even if they still qualify 2) Cutting benefits, like mental health, dental, or home-based care, 3) Reducing payments to providers and health systems.

- c) Vaccines- Recently, the Senate Homeland Security and Government Affairs Committee held a hearing titled “Examining Voices of the Vaccine Injured” While overwhelming evidence shows that vaccines’ benefits far outweigh their risks, no medical intervention is risk-free and for those affected, even rare events feel personal and profound.

The Board of Health must keep an eye on the coordinated push to dismantle the National Vaccine Injury Compensation Program (VICP). This program provides a pathway to compensation without lengthy litigation and shields manufacturers from lawsuits that could again jeopardize vaccine supply. Recently, there was a dismissal of all members of the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices and the US Preventive Services Task Force meeting was abruptly cancelled.

Dr. Vann then moved on to the discussion of Strategic Initiatives & Policy Updates:

- Community Engagement
 - Hiring in Process
 - Create a partner engagement plan
 - Define what community engagement looks like for Allegheny County Health Department.
- Internal Operations
 - New employee orientation
 - Management Orientation
 - Internal Feedback loops
 - Increased communication
 - Participation of team members at all levels
- County side- Climate Action Plan and Comprehensive Plan
- Vaccine Hesitancy communication project

Dr. Vann then provided updates on the Financial and Resource Allocation Update

- New grant – Grace and Harold Sewel Memorial Fund Grant – Public Health Librarian
- Clack Location – 4 teams still on campus (Legal, Plumbing, Solid Waste and Operations)- plans to move everyone in the next 6-12 months
- Hired a new Deputy Director of Administration (start at the beginning of August)
- Actively building the 2026 Budget

Dr. Vann concluded her presentation with the Community Engagement and Partnerships

- MCH Data Transparency and Sharing Project in partnership with AHN and UPMC (potential partners in the future)
- Serve as a member for the Allegheny County Mental Health and Intellectual Disabilities Advisory Board
- Partnered with the Mayor of West Mifflin to investigate a potential chronic disease cluster
- Participated as a permanent member of the Criminal Justice Advisory Board
- Joined colleagues and Pitt Dean of Public Health in Harrisburg and presented on Climate Change and Public Health at the One Health Symposium
- Invited Dr. Amesh Adalja (Senior Scholar with Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security and Bloomberg School of Public Health) to present on “New Vaccines and Vaccine Technologies for the Future”, presentation that he gave at the PA Immunizations Conference
- Joined the Allegheny County Superintendent meeting and continue the partnership Allegheny County Health Department has built over the years with school districts in the county.

Comments and Questions:

- Dr. Salman asked what the impact would be of the tax in Medicare on the Allegheny County population in Pennsylvania – Dr. Vann stated that 5 rural hospitals and possibly Kane hospitals will be impacted as these facilities house many Medicaid patients. These are hospitals that are ranked in the top 10% of the hospitals that have Medicaid patients and have three years in a row of negative balancing in their budget. In addition, one of the wards being represented by one of our senators has about 70,000 Medicaid recipients that could be potentially at risk.
- Dr. Yonas asked Dr. Vann’s thoughts about vaccine recommendations, the importance of vaccines and how to dispel misinformation- Dr. Vann stated the importance of obtaining the best information and evidence-based practices available.
- Dr. Snyder presented a 2-part question: 1) the historic increase resurgence of measles and the risk it poses, and 2) how would Dr. Vann characterize the Allegheny County vaccination rates for measles: superlative, satisfactory or suboptimal? Dr. Vann stated everybody should consider the risk they have personally and then in their family based on their vaccination status. Each person must take into account personal travel and movements around the county and areas that have been identified as part of the outbreak. One strategy that can be implemented is to encourage everyone to get vaccinated and complete the MMR series if they haven’t already done so. Dr. Vann then stated vaccination rates in Allegheny County would be considered optimal as

they stand at 95%, however this number is down from recent years when the vaccination rate was 97%. If the coverage rates continue to decline to less than 95% coverage will become suboptimal. Dr. Snyder then asked what steps the health department will take to not only improve measles vaccine uptake but also respiratory vaccines. Dr. Vann stated communication is vital so that everyone has access to vaccines. In addition, the health department works with school districts by offering vaccination clinics and making it as easy as possible for families to get the necessary vaccines.

- Dr. Joylette Portlock commented on vaccines and the importance of coverage remaining in the high 90's range.
- Lisa Scales asked Dr. Vann about meeting with the Superintendent and partnerships with schools and keeping the line of communication open regarding vaccines. Dr. Vann stated while the meeting didn't specifically touch the partnership structure, a lot of interest was generated when discussing back to school immunizations.
- Dr. Mendez asked Dr. Vann how the Health Department will be working with school districts and school-based health centers due to the funding shifts within the Department of Education. Dr. Vann stated this is an area where time and effort must be invested, however it's difficult to have concrete conversations on how to solve the problems and come up with solutions until more information is provided.

7. Annual Overdose Data to Action Report

Otis Pitts, JD presented the Annual Overdose Data to Action Report. A graph was provided detailing the number of deaths between the years 2012-2024. In 2017 the number of deaths was 835, but in 2024 that number was significantly reduced to 431 which was a 35% reduction from 2023. Black overdose deaths were significantly reduced from 142 in 2023 to 65 in 2024. With respect to the 2024 Overdose Death Rate by Race and Age Black deaths were highest between the age groups of 55- 64. White deaths numbered 4.

Current Trends in Illicit Drug Supply

- Fentanyl and analogs are still the primary driver of the overdose epidemic
 - 79% of deaths in preliminary 2024 data.
- Continuous presence of Xylazine as an adulterant in overdose deaths, but decreasing in the drug supply
- Introduction of Medetomidine in late 2024
 - Medetomidine is a powerful veterinary sedative, like xylazine
 - Increasing in the fentanyl supply with more regulation efforts and scheduling of Xylazine
- Multiple adulterants and contaminants found in fentanyl samples in addition to stimulants and Xylazine/Medetomidine

Naloxone has been distributed to 183 different organizations and community members. In 2023, a total of 28,908 kits were distributed. In 2025, the goal is to increase the naloxone kits to 25,000. To date, 14,305 kits have been distributed. This increase in supplies will expand low-barrier naloxone access in underserved communities with higher rates of overdose fatalities.

Community Outreach & Engagement

- Partnered with the Housing Authority and Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh to host events that connect communities to resources and treatment (e.g., housing locations, libraries, and senior high rises)
- 28 events held with partners so far in 2025
- Targeted outreach in at-risk settings (senior living centers, motels, bars, municipal court, county jail)
- Educate underserved populations about overdose prevention resources
- Conducted 45 overdose prevention training courses, reaching 881 people so far in 2025
- Implementing harm reduction and peer support programming in the Mon Valley at Allegheny County Health Department Office in McKeesport

Education and Media

- A new wave of the “Small Changes. Big Differences” social marketing campaign is in development
 - Will use a targeted messaging approach to reach older Black residents (men and Women ages 50 and up)
 - Media distribution tailored to neighborhoods and channels/platforms most likely to reach priority audiences, such as parts of the Mon Valley, the Northside, and certain eastern and southern neighborhoods in the metro area

Partners & Grants

- Funding the Allegheny Intermediate Unit to enhance school based social and emotional supports with a focus on substance use prevention in 5 school districts
 - Woodland Hills, Steel Valley, Penn Hills, Cornell, East Allegheny
- Piloting a partnership with Pittsburgh Public Schools to provide evidence-based substance use prevention education
- Continuing to fund partners across the country to provide harm reduction, linkage to care and healthcare services to people with Opioid Use Disorder or at risk for overdose through the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Overdose Data to Action grant

Final Approval for Article VI Updates – Mr. Otis Pitts presented the Article VI update for the board to vote to approve. The presentation included a description of the updates to Article VI. These changes have been through public comment and been positively recommended to move to a vote to approve by the Housing Advisory Committee. **Action:** Dr. Mike Yonas motioned to approve the Final Approval for Article VI Updates and Dr. Salman seconded. **The board approved the motion unanimously.**

Approval for Triennial Fee Increase for General Programming – Ms. Kim Joyce presented the 2026-2028 Program Fee Increases to the board for approval. This would include a 15% increase for all fees for the Food Safety, Housing, and Solid Waste programs. Annual revenue will increase by \$385,000. **Action:** Lisa Scales motioned to approve the Triennial Fee Increase for General Programming. Dr. Larkins-Pettigrew seconded. **The board approved the motion unanimously.**

Approval for Public Comment

Article XV Revision – Mr. Geoff Rabinowitz presented the Article XV: Plumbing regulation updates to the board to request to go to public comment. He mentioned that Mr. Jeffrey Czochara, Plumbing Program Manager, was also here to assist with any questions they may have. Article XV was last updated in 2022, and it adopted the 2018 International Plumbing Code (IPC). **Action:** Dr. Graham Snyder motioned to move Article XV Revision to public comment. Dr. Dara Mendez seconded. **The board approved the motion unanimously.**

Dr. Joylette made a motion to adjourn. The meeting ended at 2:40 p.m.