

Allegheny County Board of Health
May 14, 2025, 5:30 p.m.
Minutes

Present:

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

Absent:

Dr. Dara Méndez, PhD, MPH
Dr. Michael Yonas, DrPH, MPH

1. Call to Order

Dr. Joylette Portlock, Chair of the Board of Health, called May 14, 2025, meeting of the Allegheny County Health Department Board of Health to order at 5:33 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 March 19, 2025, Board of Health Meeting.

Action: Dr. Margaret Larkins-Pettigrew motioned to approve the minutes as presented and Dr. Elizabeth Cuevas seconded the motion. **The Board approved the motion unanimously.**

3. Public Comments:

Dr. Joylette Portlock moved to the public comment section of the meeting. Ms. Kim Joyce reported that there were no written agenda comments and two (2) written non-agenda comments regarding fracking.

4. Public Comments on Non-Agenda Items

- a. Naomi Umbaugh- Regulating Body Modifications
- b. Cecilia Muzika-Minteer - Dust and smoke emissions at Metalico Pittsburgh
- c. Ken Zapinski - American Lung Association Report
- d. Aarushi Pant- Air Quality
- e. Jonathan Blanton – Fracking regulations
- f. Matt Blair- Fracking
- g. McKenzie McFarland – Health Impacts of Fracking

- h. Brendan Wissinger – Fracking- not present
- i. Angelo Taranto- Riverside Concrete & Supply
- j. Jay Walker – Air quality
- k. Jude Bissonette -Health Impacts of Fracking in Allegheny County
- l. Thaddeus Popovich – ACCAN Community Meeting
- m. Matthew Mehalik- ACHD Permit Fees, Pollution Standards and Enforcement
- n. NaTisha C. Washington – Environmental Health Issues

PUBLIC COMMENTS – VIA ZOOM

- o. Jason R. Coombs – Wastewater Sampling
- p. Kelli Cain – Wastewater
- q. Barbara Lee Pace – Participation with Meetings
- r. Edward Wrenn, MD – Air pollution, health benefits of more natural landcare

5. **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 focused on the Emerging Health Threats and Policy Concerns regarding 1) Agency Restructuring; 2) Workforce Reductions; 3) Budget Cuts to Key Programs; and 4) Policy Shifts on Data and Communication. The graphic indicated key proposed changes to federal public health policies. The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) is forming the Administration for Healthy America (AHA), which absorbs key programs from agencies like Health Resources and Service Administration (HRSA), Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration (SAMHSA), and others. As a result, there will be approximately 20,000 positions eliminated across HHS with significant cuts at Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and National Institutes of Health (NIH). These reductions are expected to impact research, disease prevention, and public health preparedness efforts. The federal budget includes \$163 billion in cuts to non-defense discretionary spending, which affects healthcare, education and social services. Programs supporting LGBTQIA +health, HIV/AIDS services and mental health initiatives face substantial funding reductions. Additional directives have been issued to remove or alter thousands of federal web pages and datasets, contracts and grants particularly those related to diversity, equity and inclusion.

Dr. Iulia Vann then moved on to discussing the Emerging Health Threats and Policy Concerns that ACHD is currently facing with respect to 1) Preserving Workforce Stability by evaluating vacancies and pausing hiring in selected areas until funding clarity improves which in turn protects current staff and avoids unnecessary disruptions; 2) Program and Budget Reviews by accessing all ACHD programs for potential funding risks and identifying strategies to sustain operations; 3) Monitoring and Advocacy by communicating with state agencies, federal partners, and public health coalitions to stay informed and advocate for local needs.

Dr. Iulia Vann then moved the presentation to discuss continuing work on Strategic Initiatives and Policy Updates. At the beginning of April, we came together to celebrate the Ribbon Cutting event for our new Public Health Lab. This is a great investment and

improvement for the infrastructure for public health not just here in Allegheny County, but regionally. It will allow us to serve as a regional hub for public health response preparedness and outbreak response and have immediate turnaround for testing. The Lab was mostly paid for by COVID-19 funding which is a great example of how this funding has really been invested in the infrastructure to prepare for any public health crisis moving forward.

Dr. Iulia Vann then shared some of the disruptions in funding which may need us to look in other directions to make sure the lab has everything it needs. Planning discussions on 2027 Community Health Assessment which is a huge project that occurs every 4-5 years and analyzes what the community believes what we need to focus on and outlines the priorities that need attention.

Dr. Iulia Vann then moved on discussing Community Engagement and Partnerships and participating in recent events including joining Pitt School of Law in a panel celebrating the rich vaccine history in Allegheny County (70th anniversary of the polio vaccine trial); created space for recurrent conversations with Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC) Executive Directors; connected with Adagio Health leadership to explore partnerships; initiated the first steps in the creation of an Academic Health Department in partnership with University of Pittsburgh School of Public Health; joined the Allegheny County Executive and Pittsburgh's Mayor in discussing priorities with all local foundations; participating in the Pittsburgh's 2050 Comprehensive Plan; Partnered with Allegheny County Department of Human Services, Allegheny Intermediate Unit and the Fathers Collaborative Council of Western PA in hosting the 2nd Annual Fatherhood Engagement Conference.

Dr. Iulia Vann then gave Operational and Administrative Updates sharing that she is very sad and excited to announce that Medical Epidemiologist, Dr. Kristin Mertz retired as of May 2. Her absence will leave a huge gap in our health department; revisioning and restructuring of the Bureau of DRDC to allow more flexibility and to broaden the scope of the work that is being done; hired the Strategic Initiatives Coordinator in the Director's Office- Tori Baker.

Dr. Iulia Vann concluded her presentation with Upcoming Priorities which include starting Internal Budget conversations with each Bureau and Finance Team; Continue hiring positions in the Director's Office that are critical; Plan a leadership training day; and create strong onboarding processes and orientations.

6. Women's Health Report

Dr. Stephen Strotmeyer, Epidemiologist, reiterated that Dr. Mertz will be missed in the department.

For purposes of this presentation the Data Sources information is collected from Hospital discharge data (PHC4) and Pennsylvania birth records and death records (PADOH).

Mortality 2019-2023: Top 5 Leading Causes of Death among Women, 2019-2023. Heart disease, cancer and unintentional injuries remain the top 3 leading causes of death

among women in Allegheny County. COVID-19 has not been in the top 5 causes of death since 2021. Racial disparities persist one and one-half times more in All-Cause Mortality Rates among female residents by race. New ways to visually share information to the public by way of the Mortality Dashboard. Several years of data infant mortality maternal mortality, geographic distribution by community.

Hospitalizations 2019-2023. ACHD uses indicators developed by the Agency for Healthcare Research & Quality (AHRQ) to identify “preventable hospitalizations” Hospital admissions for conditions that may have been avoided if the patient had received timely and quality outpatient or primary care; Congestive heart failure; Asthma; COPD; Diabetes complications and Hypertension. The highest preventable hospitalization rate among women from 2019-2023 was for congestive heart failure. In 2023, the preventable hospitalization rate was 3.3 times higher among Black women than White women in Allegheny County.

Median Age at Preventable Hospitalization by Race, 2019-2023 – There are racial disparities in median age at preventable hospitalization. Black women are hospitalized for these conditions at younger ages compared to White women. Additional information can be found by visiting the Preventable Hospitalization StoryMap.

Severe Maternal Morbidity (SMM) and Mortality in Allegheny County Severe Maternal Morbidity (SMM) describes life-threatening health problems that are present at delivery, which include conditions such as renal failure or sepsis, or procedures such as blood transfusion or hysterectomy. SMM can be considered a “near-miss” of maternal mortality, as without medical care it could have resulted in death. Maternal mortality, or pregnancy-associated death, is the death of someone while pregnant or within one year of giving birth. The death can be due to any cause, whether directly due to the pregnancy or not. The rate of severe maternal morbidity increased from 188 per 10,000 births in 2016 to 330 per 10,000 births in 2023. There is a significant racial disparity in both severe maternal morbidity and maternal mortality. Additional information can be found on the SMM and Maternal Mortality StoryMap, once published.

Cancer 2018-2021. Cancer information is obtained from the Pennsylvania Department of Health (PADOH) Cancer Registry. Record information is shared with ACHD. Cancer site is defined in accordance with the National Cancer Institute Surveillance, Epidemiology, and End Results Program (SEER) Staging and Coding Guidelines, which define 23 primary sites; Cancer incidence rates are expressed as number of new cases per 100,000 population at risk; Only invasive cancers are included in counts and rates.

Overview - Cancer is the second leading cause of death in Allegheny in 2022; 152 per 100,000 cancer deaths in 2022 (Higher than United States 142.3 per 100,000); Top 5 cancer diagnoses:

- 1) Breast
- 2) Lung
- 3) Prostate
- 4) Colon
- 5) Non-Hodgkin Lymphoma

2.5% of Allegheny County population diagnosed with cancer from 2018 – 2022

Top 5 Female Cancers (Allegheny County, 2018-2021)

- Breast (140.9)
- Lung (57.4)
- Colon (31.4)
- Uterus (29.9)
- Thyroid (23.5)

In recent reports 71 percent of breast cancers in Allegheny County are being caught early by early detection.

Hepatitis C: Hepatitis C, a bloodborne virus, is one of the most common types of viral hepatitis in the United States; many infected individuals do not have symptoms and may not be aware of their infection; left untreated, hepatitis C can lead to serious liver problems like scarring and cancer; Hepatitis C can be transmitted perinatally.

Hepatitis C Case Surveillance in Allegheny County. In Pennsylvania we do have the Disease Reporting Law (PA Code, Title 28, Chapter 27) and the PA NEDSS System. Infectious disease team does access PA-NEDSS to see confirmed and probable cases whether acute or chronic. The Hepatitis C Case Surveillance is an attempt to conduct case investigations for all newly reported persons; 1) Collect information about barriers to care; 2) Educate females of reproductive age about the risk of perinatal transmission; 3) Provide resources for curative treatment; 4) Provide harm reduction education help decrease transmission to others. Case data are matched with birth records and pediatricians of perinatally exposed infants are notified about known exposures and testing recommendations.

HEP C Free Allegheny – Mission: To maximize the health and wellness of Allegheny County residents living with and at risk for hepatitis C by expanding prevention, harm reduction, education, testing, and timely access to care and treatment.

Summary of the presentation:

- In 2023, the mortality rate among Black women was **1.4 times higher** than White women in Allegheny County;
- From 2019-2023 the median age at preventable hospitalization among Black women was **12 years younger** than White women;
- In 2023, the preventable hospitalization rate as **3.3 times higher** among Black women than White women in Allegheny County.

7. Committee Update:

Three (3) committees were recently established: Policy and Procedures:

- a) Dr. Graham Snyder: The committee has begun drafting changes to the current by-laws, based on community dialog, considering legal issues. Dr. Graham Snyder would like to solicit from board members written or via email any changes you would like implemented by May 28th.

- b) Fracking Committee (unconventional oil and gas drilling) An initial meeting was conducted. Determine what the Health Department can do Only one (1) meeting has taken place so updates will follow.
- c) Ideation Committee – Two (2) meetings have been conducted to date. Kicked off Phase I of the work and in this phase, we are collecting information from other Board of Health members as well as the Health Department leadership to better understand current Board of Health priorities, areas of capacity along with strengths and challenges we have. Information will then be presented at the July Board Meeting and recommendations will be made based on findings.

8. New Business

Mr. Otis Pitts, Deputy Director of Food, Housing & Public Policy, discussed the proposed update to the existing Article VI: Houses and Community Environment regulation. The proposed revisions are related to abatement. Abatements speak to identifying public health nuisance properties and resolving the issues. These are community environment exterior violations that cause larger public threats to neighbors and the community at large – such as tire piles. The proposed regulations were reviewed by the Housing Advisory Committee with a positive recommendation to be brought to the board for 30-day public comment period.

Mr. Otis Pitts requested the Article 6 regulation update be moved to a (30-day public comment period). Ms. Lisa Seales motioned to move Article 6 Abatement revision to public comment. Dr. Khlood Salman seconded. The board approved the motion unanimously.

Dr. Khlood Salman made a motion to adjourn. Dr. Graham Snyder seconded. The meeting ended at 8:33 pm.