

ALLEGHENY COUNTY BOARD OF HEALTH

MINUTES

May 13, 2020

Present: Lee Harrison, MD, Chair  
William Youngblood, Vice Chair  
Debra Bogen, MD, Secretary  
Anthony Ferraro  
Ellen Stewart, MD  
Edith Shapira, MD  
Donald Burke, MD  
Caroline Mitchell  
Joylette Portlock, PhD  
Absent: Kotayya Kondaveeti, MD

1. **Call to Order**

Due to the emergency order issued by Governor Wolf in relation to COVID-19, the meeting was held virtually. The meeting was livestreamed online, in order to enable the public to observe the meeting. Public comments were submitted in writing in advance and were read during the meeting by Todd Bogdanovich

Dr. Harrison called the meeting to order.

2. **Approval of Minutes from March 4, 2020**

Dr. Harrison asked if there were any comments or questions about the minutes. There were none.

**Action:** Dr. Stewart moved to approve the minutes, Mr. Youngblood seconded the motion.

**Motion passed unanimously.**

3. **Public Comments on Agenda Items**

**A. Jess Stambaugh, re: COVID Response**

Ms. Stambaugh asked what extra precautions were being done to protect those with underlying health conditions.

**B. Alyia Paulding, re: COVID Response**

Ms. Paulding wrote that she was extremely concerned that going 'yellow' will mean that

residents will abandon social distancing guidelines, resulting in a second wave of COVID-19 infections. She asked ACHD to express clear and prudent guidelines and to be as cautious as possible.

**C. Judith Riddell**

Ms. Riddell wrote that we need more reliable testing for everyone before opening.

**D. James Lyons-Weiler, PhD, re: COVID Response**

Dr Lyons-Weiler wrote that the United States still has no feasible COVID-19 testing and tracking ability. He stated that the CDC failed by turning down a validated RT-PCR COVID-19 test from Germany and insisting on designing their own test. Their flawed test allowed infected individuals to spread the virus. Dr. Lyons-Weiler stated that the FDA should allow citizens to check their own status privately, which it currently does not allow.

**E. Marci O'Donnell, re: COVID Response**

Ms. O'Donnell wrote that Allegheny County has done its part in preventing the Corona virus from spreading. She stated that we must now acknowledge that there will be some viral spread and that zero exposure is not attainable. She stated that the Board has the responsibility to respond to more issues than one and that lack of access to healthcare, dental, vision, and increases in mental health problems are a much greater threat than COVID-19 infections.

**F. Black Pittsburgh COVID Data Working Group, re: COVID Response**

The Group requested a strategic, equitable, and robust testing strategy which vastly increases testing, case investigation, contact tracing, and plans for quarantine of exposed contacts that will enable a safer transition from the red phase to the yellow phase. The Group also requested systematic efforts to reduce missing data on race moving forward as well as systematic efforts to retrieve race and ethnicity data retrospectively where possible.

**G. Jim Attanucci, re: COVID Response**

Mr. Attanucci wrote that indoor Zumba classes of approximately 10-12 people could be held in a community room and outdoor Zumba classes could be held in a local park.

**H. Swain Uber, re: COVID Response**

Mr. Uber wrote that there have been 28 cumulative positive results of COVID-19 amongst those incarcerated at the Allegheny County Jail. Five staff members have also tested positive. Mr. Swain called for an immediate implementation of a universal testing policy for the Allegheny County Jail and alternative housing facilities, to encompass both incarcerated persons and staff.

**I. Laura Perkins, re: Casa San Jose, re: COVID Response**

Ms. Perkins wrote that she is concerned for the welfare of the human beings currently residing in the Allegheny County Jail. She stated that they are not being afforded the basic right to healthcare that non-incarcerated Allegheny County residents receive. She requested universal testing of all inmates, staff, and visitors at the Jail. She also requested that ACHD speak with inmates of the Jail in order to receive accurate information about health conditions within the Jail.

**J. Brenda Lynn Smith, Nine Mile Run Watershed Association, re: COVID Response**

Ms. Smith wrote that several studies strongly suggest that people who have been breathing polluted air for many years are more likely to become sicker when infected with the novel coronavirus and are also more likely to die from it. She stated that in this context, it is imperative for the Board to take stronger and more immediate action to curtail illegal pollution for the small number of industrial sources in this county.

**K. Garret Wassermann, re: COVID Response**

Mr. Wassermann wrote that he supports universal COVID-19 testing to track the spread of the Coronavirus and enable proper quarantining procedures. He stated that he is very concerned about the health of the workers and incarcerated individuals at the Allegheny County Jail. Mr. Wassermann urged the Board to work with the Jail to implement universal testing. He also urged the Board to advocate for the release of incarcerated individuals whom are being held on non-violent charges and simply cannot afford bail.

**L. Ron Gavalik, re: COVID Response**

Mr. Gavalik wrote that he is the Media Coordinator for the Green Party of Allegheny County. The Green Party stated to the Board that not enough is being done to protect the welfare of inmates and the community from the COVID-19 threat. The Green Party urged universal testing of inmates, staff, and visitors at the Jail.

**M. Alison Fujito, re: COVID Response**

Ms. Fujito requested that the Board collect data for each COVID-19 patient hospitalized in Allegheny County to include all previous medical treatments, including vaccines, in the year leading up to infection; all interventions given to treat the virus; specific underlying health issues for each patient; whether the patient smoked; whether the patient vaped; and whether the patient lived in an area with higher air pollution levels. She also requested that the Board find a way to enable COVID-19 test kits, for both infection and exposure, to be available at a reasonable price to all consumers for in-home testing.

**N. Rebecca Shaffer, re: COVID Response**

Ms. Shaffer wrote that daycares should not open until regular schools open.

#### 4. **Old Business**

##### **A. Environmental Health Programs Update**

Jim Kelly, Deputy Director of Environmental Health, provided an update regarding the Environmental Health programs. He stated that the Food Safety Program has been reaching out to food facilities for compliance assistance. The Food Safety Program is not doing full inspections but is conducting spot-checks and COVID safety investigations. Much time is spent responding to complaints. The Food Safety Program has also been creating many hand-outs and working to develop re-opening guidance.

Mr. Kelly stated that the Housing Program has a lot of experience with principal investigations. It is also helping with quarantine housing. At present, only emergency complaints are being responded to. The number of emergency complaints is unchanged since March 2019. Re-opening guidance for pools and hotels is being developed. Pools will not re-open under the Yellow phase.

There has not been much change with the Plumbing Program, or with the Solid Waste & Water Pollution Control Program. Plumbing continues to respond to residential issues and to a lot of activity for construction of hospitals.

Mr. Kelly stated that the Air Quality Program is continuing business as usual. He stated that there has been a decrease in public hearings. He stated that hearings related to hospitals are a priority, and that those public hearings will be held virtually. He noted an increase in open burning complaints and stated that those complaints are related to some health issues. The Permitting Section of the Air Quality Program is doing well and is working from home. Mr. Kelly stated that the RACT Plan deadlines have been met. He stated that there have been no new enforcement notices but assured the Board that inspections are continuing at Clairton for US Steel. Regarding emissions, Mr. Kelly stated that PM2.5 measurements are at historic lows and that transportation-related emissions have decreased by 40% to 50%. He stated that Allegheny County typically has very good ventilations during this time of year and has few inversions.

##### **B. Surveillance Update (non-COVID-19)**

Dr. LuAnn Brink, Chief Epidemiologist, stated that the Bureau of Assessment, Statistics and Epidemiology is still mindful of issues such as child immunizations, lead testing, and electronic surveillance for chronic conditions. Regarding influenza, Dr. Brink noted that due to physical distancing there was almost zero cases of influenza by week 12 of the current flu season. She provided data comparing the 2019-2020 Flu Season as of April 25, 2020 and the 2018-2019 Flu Season as of April 27, 2019. The 2019-2020 Season had 13,801 total cases; 174 total hospitalizations; and 15 total deaths. The 2018-2019 Season had 9,790 total cases; 284 total hospitalizations; and 27 total deaths.

Regarding asthma, Dr. Brink noted that the Asthma Task Force began convening in 2018. In the United States, 42.7 million people have asthma, which is 13.3% of the population.

Nationally, 8% of children have asthma. In Allegheny County, 11% of children have asthma. Allegheny County also has a racial disparity for asthma. The rate for Emergency Department visits for white children was 21/10,000 compared to 153/10,000 for black children. Dr. Brink stated that the communities of Troy Hill, the Hill District, Garfield, Homewood, and Duquesne had the highest rates of Emergency Department visits for asthma. Between 28% and 33% of children in these communities had at least one Emergency Department visit in 2017. The Asthma Task Force conducted a root cause analysis to understand why these results occurred. The factors were discussed and clustered into three causal groups: structural inequity, education, and patient advocacy; environmental triggers; and access.

Dr. Brink ended her presentation by stating that ACHD continues to watch fatal and nonfatal overdoses, and that an overdose dashboard will be deployed over the summer.

## 5. **New Business**

### **A. COVID Response**

Dr. Debra Bogen, ACHD Director, stated that ACHD has engaged in an all-hands-on-deck response to COVID. She stated that on March 14<sup>th</sup>, Allegheny County officials called for 'non-essential' businesses to close voluntarily for at least two weeks to limit the spread of coronavirus. On March 23<sup>rd</sup>, Governor Tom Wolf issued a 'Stay at Home Order' for Allegheny County. The Governor's order directed that all people should stay at home except for essential things, all non-life sustaining businesses should be closed, and residents should engage in social distancing and hand-washing. On May 15<sup>th</sup>, the Governor will transition Allegheny County to the yellow phase of reopening.

Dr. Bogen reported to the Board that ACHD's responses included expanding epidemiological capacity to conduct case investigations and contact tracing, adjusting ACHD program operations to account for stay at home orders while preserving essential functions, deploying technology to support remote department operations, providing fit-testing for N95 masks for County employees, coordinating logistically with Allegheny County Emergency Services to address unmet healthcare PPE needs, surveying Medical Reserve Corps members for availability and skills, and participating in multiple calls per week on COVID-19 response planning and situational awareness.

Case investigations are triggered by labs reporting positive and negative results via PA-NEDSS. Positive results trigger an immediate call from a case investigator, who gathers information, provides guidance and issues an isolation letter, and identifies contacts. Tracing of contacts involves identifying people who were within 6 feet for a few minutes of a confirmed case while they were symptomatic, or 48 hours before the onset of symptoms. Contacts are assigned to a contact tracing team for follow-up. Dr. Bogen stated that ACHD has successfully reached approximately 90% of identified contacts.

Testing is conducted mostly by health care providers. There was limited testing availability for a long time, but that is now improving. ACHD established a COVID specimen collection site at the Clack Campus on March 17<sup>th</sup>. Specimens collected by ACHD were initially sent to a state lab, but the County lab received approval to process samples approximately 3 weeks ago. There are plans to get test kits into all FQHCs and to homeless care providers. ACHD's website has a regularly updated testing site locator.

Available data includes the number tested, positive, and deceased per day; the number tested, positive, and deceased by gender, race, age group, municipality and neighborhood; the positivity rate per day; and cumulative hospitalizations. Current limitations of data include limitations on race and ethnicity data due to this information being missing from some laboratory data sets, delays in entering data into NEDSS and some negative results not being entered, and hospital data not being automated into NEDSS.

ACHD set up a COVID hotline to provide information to the public. The Poison Control Center has been assisting with callers who are symptomatic. ACHD also created a COVID website and dashboard. Multilingual Allegheny Alerts are issued daily. And a weekly briefing is streamed via Facebook Live on Wednesday afternoons.

Dr. Bogen informed the Board that health equity is essential and is of concern to ACHD. She noted that health inequities are longstanding in our community and COVID-19 is no exception. Such inequities include communities of color having higher risk of community spread of the disease to a higher-prevalence of frontline workers who are less likely to work from home and more likely to take public transit; higher rates of comorbid conditions such as heart disease, diabetes, obesity, and COPD; and lower access to testing. ACHD is responding by holding listening sessions in conjunction with DHS with clergy and other leaders from the African-American, Latinx, immigrant, and LGBT communities. ACHD has also held meetings with black elected officials and County Council.

Regarding the number of contact tracers and case investigators needed, flexibility will be needed to adapt to the daily need. Such flexibility can be provided by mobilizing Medical Reserve Corps members and having ten to twenty health professional students per month assist ACHD as part of an interprofessional public health elective course with their universities.

Dr. Bogen stated that it has been an honor to serve with ACHD's employees in response to COVID. Dr. Harrison thanked Dr. Bogen and stated that the whole Board appreciates what ACHD has done.

Mr. Ferraro asked about the current status of PPE for staff and frontline workers. Dr. Bogen stated that ACHD has adequate supplies that are supplied by Allegheny County Emergency Management. She stated that there were early issues, but that the situation is fine now.

Dr. Burke asked about asymptomatic transmission. Dr. Bogen stated at least 50% are asymptomatic. She stated that much more testing will need to be done during re-opening. UPMC has been testing all patients prior to undergoing procedures and these tests have shown very low positivity rates. Dr. Burke next asked about contact tracing and how often contacts become infected. Dr. Brink stated that ACHD has not been able to answer a great deal about that at this point. Contacts are advised to get back in touch with ACHD if symptoms begin.

Dr. Portlock asked about the testing rates over time. Dr. Bogen said that the peak was 800-900 per day, with an average of 400-500 per day. She stated that there has been a bit of a rise in the last week due to the hospitals conducting pre-procedure testing. She expects a large increase in testing as Allegheny County re-opens. Dr. Portlock asked what is happening with geographically expanding testing. Dr. Bogen stated that FQHCs will help expand testing geographically. Dr. Portlock next asked about excess non-COVID mortality. Dr. Brink stated that there is a fairly long process for coding causes of death and that there is currently very incomplete data. Dr. Harrison agreed with Dr. Brink that this will obviously take time. Dr. Portlock asked how much testing is needed. Dr. Bogen stated that depends on how adherent people are to restrictions and there is no way to predict that. Dr. Portlock asked about changes in staffing and reallocation of duties for ACHD staff. Dr. Bogen said that was different a week ago and different a month ago. Dr. Brink stated that at the peak, 30 medical students were assisting ACHD. ACHD staff from clinics and the Housing Program have also been assisting.

## **B. Prevention Point Pittsburgh's Annual Report**

Aaron Arnold, Executive Director of Prevention Point Pittsburgh, stated that Prevention Point is required to give the Board an annual report. He stated that Prevention Point is the only authorized syringe services program and the largest community-based distributor of naloxone outside of Philadelphia. Prevention Point has five locations within the City of Pittsburgh. Work had begun in late 2019 on planning for the first site outside of the City of Pittsburgh, but that planning is currently postponed. Prevention Point continues to work during COVID, as Syringe Services Programs were designated essential healthcare services by the Pennsylvania Department of Health.

In 2019, Prevention Point distributed 664,890 syringes across all its sites. There was a total of 2,939 interactions. Additionally, 2,579 naloxone kits were distributed, and 453 overdose reversals were reported. The Overbrook site documented at least one overdose reversal per week in its first year. Additionally, over 2,000 fentanyl test strips were distributed. 197 individuals received help accessing substance use treatment, which is approximately 20% of program participants.

Dr. Harrison thanked Mr. Arnold for his presentation.

## **C. Air Program – Permit Fee Regulation Revision**

Jayne Graham, ACHD's Air Quality Program Manager, stated that this request is for final approval. She stated that the Board approved a public comment period in July 2019, the period was from July to August 2019, and a public hearing was held on August 26, 2019. She noted that fees will be consistent with the state's fees.

**Action:** Mr. Youngblood moved to grant final approval to the permit fee regulation revision, Dr. Shapira seconded the motion.

**Motion passed unanimously.**

*At this time, Dr. Stewart excused herself and left the meeting.*

#### **D. Environmental Health Fund Request: Change Management Training, \$6,820**

Mr. Kelly stated that all levels of management in the Environmental Health Bureau attended Change Management training from Feb. 11-13. This included all supervisors, administrators, program managers and the deputy director. The training was conducted at the Department's Clack campus by AIM Consulting Associates. AIM worked with the Department to develop training criteria specific for regulatory agencies staffed with associates with technical and scientific backgrounds. All participants attended a one-day session while all program managers, assistant program manager, and the deputy director also attended an executive session. The purpose of the training was to provide the Bureau's management staff with the skills to initiate and implement change necessary to be a highly functioning organization capable of adapting to public health needs in a regulatory environment. Mr. Kelly requested \$6,820 from the Environmental Health Fund for this training.

**Action:** Dr. Portlock moved to approve the expenditure of \$6,820 from the Environmental Health Fund for change management training, Dr. Shapira seconded the motion.

**Motion passed unanimously.**

#### **E. Environmental Health Fund Request: Lead Community Outreach Coordinator, \$57,000**

Mr. Kelly stated that since September 2019 the Lead Community Outreach Coordinator position, funded through a grant awarded to the ACHD Maternal and Child Health program, has been attached to the Housing and Community Environment program to help with our lead risk assessment activities. The addition of this position has been invaluable to our lead risk assessment program. Previously the risk assessor would have to do both family education and home assessment on their own. This would typically require 3-4 hours, a significant commitment for many families. The outreach coordinator has allowed us to maintain a high level of service while reducing the amount of time needed to perform an inspection, all the while increasing the amount and quality of education provided to the families we serve. Reduced inspection times allow more families to take advantage of ACHD lead risk assessments. The grant period for this

position ends in June 2020, with this environmental health fund request we hope to continue this position and maintain a high quality of service for the citizens of Allegheny County.

The Lead Community Outreach Coordinator will assist the Housing and Community Environment program with direct education and community outreach in our efforts to reduce the effect of elevated blood lead levels in Allegheny County. This position will be filled by a public health nurse. Their primary responsibility will be to accompany the HCE Senior Sanitarians on lead-based paint risk assessments to provide education to the families of children with elevated blood lead levels. The secondary responsibility will be to attend community events (parent meetings, health fairs, tabling events, etc.) and provide outreach to families about lead safety and how to reduce household lead exposure. Additional duties will include contacting pediatric practices to obtain referrals for lead risk assessments, contacting families to offer health department services, providing over the phone education to those families who decline an in-home investigation, and case management for children with very high blood lead levels.

**Action:** Dr. Shapira moved to approve the expenditure of up to \$57,000 from the Environmental Health Fund for the lead community outreach coordinator, Dr. Burke seconded the motion.

**Motion passed unanimously.**

7. **Public Comments on Non-Agenda Items**

**A. Amy Brown, re: Improving Healthy Immune Systems**

Ms. Brown requested that the Board of Health begins promoting ways for nursing home residents and the general public to proactively improve their immune systems. The message being relayed to everyone is to stay home, wear a mask and socially distance. Those things do not improve your body's ability to fight a virus.

**B. Marian Pokrywka, re: Childhood Vaccinations**

Ms. Pokrywka requested that the Board please comment on the news that childhood vaccinations have been delayed and that possible outbreaks of other preventable diseases may be impending with this outcome.

**C. Rebecca Hampshire, re: Vaccines**

Ms. Hampshire wrote that President Trump has cut much needed funds for research into strains of dangerous viruses. She asked how we will be safe or how a vaccine will be developed if so, many things are going wrong and continually wrong choices are being made by our government.

**D. Edith Abeyta, re: COVID and Air Quality**

Ms. Abeyta wrote that she is a resident of North Braddock and lives approximately one half of a mile away from the Edgar Thomson plant. She wrote of her surprise, shock, and fear

when she read of studies linking an increase in susceptibility to contracting COVID-19 for those living with poor air quality. She stated her desire to survive the pandemic and requested that the Board and ACHD adopt a health justice position by prioritizing public health over profits.

**E. Lorraine Starsky, re: Health Care Resources**

Ms. Starsky wrote that many people who have been laid off due to the pandemic are also losing their employer sponsored health insurance. This will create even more hardship, especially for people who have chronic conditions. She requested that ACHD widely publicize a provision of the Affordable Care Act that in circumstances such as the loss of health insurance there is a 60-day window in which to apply for a health plan under the ACA. Information is available at [www.healthcare.gov/get-coverage](http://www.healthcare.gov/get-coverage) . Those who need help navigation the application process can contact the Consumer Health Coalition at 412-456-1877. ACHD also publishes a Guide to Health Care Resources for People who are Underinsured and Uninsured, which is available at:

[www.alleghenycounty.us/uploadedFiles/Allegheny\\_Home/Health\\_Department/Programs/Chronic\\_Disease\\_Prevention/Insuredlinked.pdf](http://www.alleghenycounty.us/uploadedFiles/Allegheny_Home/Health_Department/Programs/Chronic_Disease_Prevention/Insuredlinked.pdf) .

**F. John Detwiler, re: Air Quality**

Mr. Detwiler wrote that he is a resident of the City of Pittsburgh. Even during this pandemic, our toxic air has a greater impact on mortality and morbidity than the corona virus especially for the most vulnerable County residents. It is only human nature to react to a crisis, and to neglect chronic problems. We have shut down virtually the entire economy and social activity of our region in response to COVID-19, yet ACHD has not been able to move the needle on air quality. Mr. Detwiler noted that environmental health and vulnerable populations are under-represented on the Board of Health and requested that the Board and Dr. Bogen meet with the County Executive regarding new appointments to the Board.

**G. Leslie Stem, re: Jail & Air Quality**

Ms. Stem wrote that she is a resident of Allegheny County and lives in the 15104 ZIP code. She requested that ACHD push for testing for every incarcerated person, all staff, and all visitors to the Allegheny County Jail. She wrote that she has struggled with the air quality in the Mon Valley since moving to this region 12 years ago. She stated that this is due to lack of oversight of industry. The community has sent the County Executive names of who to appoint to the Board to reflect the changing needs and identities of the citizens represented across the County. She requested that the Board put the community's health above its own interests by pushing the County Executive to keep the Board relevant and responsible to Allegheny County residents.

**H. Michael Rhoads, US Steel, re: US Steel Clairton Plant Update**

Mr. Rhoads wrote that he is the Plant Manager of the Clairton Plant of the Mon Valley Works. He noted that the team at Clairton had a record-breaking month in April for batter stack opacity compliance. The April compliance rate was 99.95% for the combined stacks and for the

third month this year, a perfect 100% compliance with the 60% standard. Actions completed year to date include establishment of a Community Advisory Panel and a fully-funded community benefit trust, B Battery shed improvements were completed, and the installation of upgraded filter bags and filter bag cages on all PEC baghouses was completed. Actions in progress include work on an initial environmental report, the environmental compliance audit is on track to be completed by the deadline, a permit application for replacement of PEC baghouses for Batteries 13-15 and 19-20 is on target to be submitted by July 1<sup>st</sup>, and replacement of all endfluses on Batteries 1, 2, and 3 is on target to be completed by September 2020. Since the March COVID-19 stay at home orders, there have been no exceedances of the national air quality standards in Allegheny County. Mr. Rhoads wrote that US Steel is committed to supporting ACHD's development of a science-based model to better predict inversions and their intensity.

#### **I. Matthew Mehalik, Breathe Project, re: Air Quality**

Dr. Mehalik wrote that he is the Executive Director of the Breathe Project. He warmly welcomed Dr. Bogen to her new role as ACHD Director. He noted the core need for institutional leadership to protect the health of our County's residents from both chronic and acute air quality issues. This was true before the current pandemic and is especially true during this pandemic. There is no demonstrable reduction in PM2.5 pollution this year for the Liberty monitor. The 2020 PM2.5 levels at Liberty are all within the range of weather variability when compared with past years. Reducing air pollution during a virus such as Coronavirus, which is known to cause tissue inflammation and organ damage, should be a top priority.

#### **J. Alison Keating, re: Cash Bail & Open Burning**

Ms. Keating wrote that Allegheny County's policy of cash bail and criminalization of both poverty and mental illness will increase the spread of the coronavirus through the most marginalized communities in the County. The Board of Health has the responsibility to protect the health of those oppressed by our existing health system built on profits, not public health policy. Ms. Keating also noted that she has reported the repeated open burning by Duquesne Light at their Beaver Avenue property and hopes to see enforcement.

#### **K. Gabrielle Monroe, Community Gone Rogue, re: Stigmatization of Sex Workers**

Ms. Monroe requested that sex workers be considered when considering public health in Allegheny County. Many local full-service sex workers were denied stimulus and denied PUAs and are in need to survive this pandemic. Sex workers need folks to listen to them and not dictating what they need. Sex workers in Allegheny County have been denied the right to report violence against them. Some cops in this area sexually assault and rape sex workers. Ending stigma about sex work in the community should be a public health service that is enacted immediately. Ms. Monroe requested a campaign to educate the public that sex work is work and deserving of the same workers' rights, resources and protections as other workers.

8. **Adjournment**

Dr. Shapira moved to adjourn the meeting, Mr. Youngblood seconded the adjournment.