



Task Force of Border Health Officials (TFBHO) Meeting

Brown-Heatly Building, Public Hearing Room
4900 N. Lamar St., Austin, TX 78751

June 7, 2019

| Member Name | Yes | No | Professional Representatives (non-members) |
|-----------------------------------|-----|----|--|
| Esmeralda Guajardo, MAHS | ✓ | | (by phone) |
| Hector Gonzalez, MD, MPH | ✓ | | |
| Steven M. Kotsatos, RS | ✓ | | |
| Josh Ramirez, MPA, CPM | ✓ | | |
| Eduardo Olivarez | ✓ | | |
| Arturo Rodriguez, DNP, MPA, CPM | ✓ | | |
| Robert Resendes, MBA, MT (ASCP) | | ✓ | |
| Emilie Prot, DO, MPH | | ✓ | |
| Lillian Ringsdorf, MD, MPH | | ✓ | |
| State Representative Bobby Guerra | | ✓ | Represented by Julian Whitacre |
| Senator Eddie Lucio Jr. | | ✓ | Represented by Daniel Esparza and Elsa Garza |

Attendees Present

Francesca Kupper, John Villarreal, Dr. RJ Dutton, Jeffrey Koss, Sebastian Laroche, Nancy Ejuma, Henry Presas, Julian Whitacre, Felipe Rocha, David Gruber, Imelda Garcia, Alberto Perez, Feliziana Torres, Claudia Bustos, Jennifer Nguyen, Adriana Flores, Brett Spencer, Sebastian Maldonado, Shannon Richter, Lesley Brannan, Jennifer Shuford, Pam Wilson, Laura Robinson, Jodie Banyo and Evelyn Hahn.

Agenda Item I: Call to Order, Welcome, Chair Remarks, Meeting Logistics and Roll Call

Vice Chair Gonzalez called the meeting to order at 9:06 a.m. Dr. Gonzalez welcomed everyone to the Task Force of Border Health Officials (Task Force) Meeting. He announced that the meeting was being webcast and if any members were participating by phone. Chair Guajardo joined the meeting by phone and expressed her apologies for missing the meeting and thanked Dr. Gonzalez for leading the meeting today.

Ms. Kupper read open meeting guidelines and completed the roll call to confirm a quorum. A quorum was established.

Dr. Gonzalez thanked everyone for attending and for their service. He also expressed appreciation for the public service of Task Force members daily, especially regarding the migrant issue on the border.



Chair Guajardo agreed with Dr. Gonzalez's sentiments. She thanked the state and other Task Force Members who lead local health departments who deal with this sensitive issue as well and appreciated their efforts.

Agenda Item II: Approval of March 8, 2018 Meeting Minutes

Dr. Gonzalez asked Task Force members had time to review the March 8 meeting minutes. Dr. Rodriguez requested that Chris Haggstrom be noted as interim director for City of Brownsville. Mr. Eddie Olivarez motioned to approve the minutes, noting Dr. Rodriguez' revision. Mr. Steven Kotsatos seconded the motion. The meeting minutes were approved.

Agenda Item III: Presentation – Community Health Worker Certification Program 101 and collaboration with the Office of Border Public Health as a Training Center

Dr. Gonzalez welcomed Brett Spencer and Adriana Flores. They introduced themselves and presented an overview of their program and their collaborative efforts with the Office of Border Public Health(OBPH). Mr. Spencer explained that he would initiate the presentation and Ms. Flores would present most of the presentation as the Community Health Worker(CHW)/Promotores expert. Dr. RJ Dutton and Mr. John Villarreal also addressed collaborative efforts with their program.



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Mr. Olivarez asked questions regarding CHWs/Promotores curricula. Ms. Flores explained that new rule allows DSHS and HHSC programs to produce curricula that would allow certified training credits for CHW/Promotores. She also answered questions on other related matters.

Mr. Spencer spoke of collaborations and stated that a CHW/Promotores Conference is being planned for August of 2019.

Dr. RJ Dutton spoke of the CHW Training Center Plan. He also expressed that the OBPH Training Center would be receiving recommendations from the Task Force regarding curricula and spoke of continued collaboration on behalf of OBPH. He also explained that the upcoming conference would be an accomplishment with hopes of it becoming a yearly event. Dr. Dutton reiterated that the training center was one of 39 other training centers in the state, with OBPH being the only training center within DSHS. He presented Claudia Bustos as the newly-hired Community-based Healthy Border Coordinator. She will be leading the charge regarding the development of the OBPH Training Center.

Dr. Gonzalez asked about border representation on the CHW Committee. Ms. Flores explained that state-wise, equitable representation is considered for all committee members. She also explained that meetings are held in Austin as a neutral site (much like



the Task Force) and that webcasting access is a must regardless of location. Dr. Gonzalez also asked about CEUs for non-residents, since many public health professionals from Mexico attend binational trainings. Ms. Flores explained that continuing education credits can only be granted to Texas residents. If other states or countries want to accept the credits, that is up to them.

Dr. Gonzalez thanked Ms. Flores and expressed how important it was to have standardized training, including pre-natal, post-partum, breastfeeding, disease management to help people understand the importance of diabetes management and other illnesses, such as dementia due stigmas with behavioral health and substance abuse.

Dr. Dutton expressed that we have a lot of aspirations for our training center. He explained that we're just beginning and that OBPH looks forward to working together with many networks and conducting strategic planning and needs assessments to examine where to make the best impact to partner and build coalitions.

Ms. Flores agreed and addressed Dr. Gonzalez' comment about dementia. She explained that a curriculum regarding dementia had recently been approved from the Alzheimer's Association of Texas as a Training Center, based on the basics of Alzheimer's Disease and dementia, including signs and symptoms, specifically for CHW/Promotores.

Dr. Gonzalez thanked Ms. Flores and Dr. Dutton for their continued work with CHWs and expressed the need for border, data-driven curricula to focus on Latino and cultural issues. Mr. Spencer clarified that the program is working expeditiously to lay the groundwork on rules to prepare to receive input from Task Force members.

Dr. Rodriguez asked about cultural awareness and bilingual curricula issues related to core competencies. Ms. Flores explained that this particular topic falls under "communication" as a core competency to ensure that CHWs that are not bilingual in English/Spanish are knowledgeable about bilingual resources available at the community level, so they pass that information to CHWs. Mr. Villarreal explained that the OBPH Training Center was considering required bilingual, side-by-side slides on all related curricula. Dr. Gonzalez thanked OBPH for their continued work with CHWs.

A break was taken at 10:15am. Task Force members reconvened at 10:25am.

Agenda Item IV: Presentation – South Texas Adolescent Summit

Dr. G introduced Alberto Perez, Regional Manager for Region 11 (OBPH). Mr. Perez presented an overview of the South Texas Adolescent Summit with details from last year's summit and plans for another successful event later this year.





Agenda Item V: Presentation – Legislative Update

Dr. Gonzalez thanked Daniel Esparza and Elsa Garza from Senator Lucio’s office and Representative Guerra’s staff, including Julian Whitacre, for their work in highlighting critical issues on the border.

Daniel Esparza introduced himself and expressed Senator Lucio’s regrets for not being able to attend the meeting. He also thanked Mr. Olivarez and Dr. Gonzalez for their assistance throughout the legislative season.

As staff architect, helped Senator Lucio introduce nine bills due to their involvement with the Task Force. He explained that all nine bills initially passed in the Senate, seven of which resulted from Task Force work. From there, three bills were heard while others were held up in the political process. He thanked Commissioner Hellerstedt, state agencies and encouraged the Task Force to continue to develop ways to accomplish efforts within the existing framework and statutory structure.

He acknowledged Mr. Olivarez’ valiancy in explaining to legislators how prevention is the key to public health, as opposed to reaction. He expressed how the border region needs a different level of leadership so that we don’t sit and wait for legislative action to fill a need. He continued with comments on the need to prevent disease and, in doing so, saving the state hundreds of thousands of dollars, and the value of human lives to continue improving Texas’ response to community health crises, expressing that this legislative session was a good starting point. He also asked Task Force Members, on behalf of Senator Lucio, to build on established relationships, collaborations and existing efforts within their structure to positively transform the border and thanked members for their dedication. He also provided details on the three bills, especially the one that past, SB 1312.

Mr. Julian Whitaker from Representative Guerra’s office also thanked Task Force members for their work and support during the 2019 legislative session.

Ms. Elsa Garza, from Senator Lucio’s office, referenced the Task Force Legislative Report, expressing that language from Goal A’s Environmental Health Priority (page 12 of the report) included language within SB 1312.

Dr. Gonzalez asked if members had questions or comments.

Mr. Olivarez acknowledged all members and Senator Lucio’s and Representative Guerra’s staff for their long hours of dedication to move border-related bills forward within the legislative process. He also stated his personal observation of how the Task Force efforts laid a foundation within a relatively short amount of time to establish groundwork, which produced bills that went through the last moments of both the House and Senate floor, going further than most bills submitted in session this year. This was a huge success. The next challenge is to educate the interior of the state. They need to understand that the immigration issue is not just a border issue. Immigrants may end up in every Texas county and in other states. We must properly inform and educate them on binational and border-related issues that will transcend the border and impact public health, safety and security



for the entire state. Furthermore, we need to support Commissioner Hellerstedt and bring more solutions than problems. He was instrumental in convening his counterparts at the upcoming Binational Health Commission meeting that will take place in San Diego, CA two weeks from now. We, as a Task Force, must support him to represent the entire border from California to Texas. We must not give up on our recommendations, especially the response component, infectious disease and Border Epidemiological Surveillance Teams (BEST program). He closed by thanking Task Force members and staff members of Senator Lucio and Representative Guerra.

Dr. Gonzalez thanked Mr. Olivarez, legislative and DSHS staff for their efforts. He also addressed the importance of collaboration with our federal partners, realizing that the immigration issue will reach other cities and states, including Houston, Chicago, New York, Miami, New Jersey, Oregon, Seattle, Washington. These are cities that have been mentioned to me. Are we doing what we can to rule out TB, measles, mumps, typhus, etc. Our local efforts will impact beyond the border region. We need to sit with Dr. Dutton and start preparing now for the next legislative efforts. He mentioned how we can work with Commissioner Gruber's staff to be resilient and continue to work on our mission.

Mr. Olivarez proposed that we immediately take on these challenges and reassess how we can adjust or add to them so that we have a very clear plan of action. This will allow us to prepare the required reports and take this to the next level. This should be in place by the December meeting.

Mr. Josh Ramirez mentioned that we should not let go of our past but also move forward with new processes and next steps and embrace new challenges as well.

Dr. Dutton spoke about what can be implemented at the state level that is quite feasible. Dr. Gonzalez asked if Commissioner Gruber had anything to add.

Commissioner Gruber thanked Task Force members for their support, especially during the legislative session. The Task Force provided important input. He also mentioned that goals, such as the response teams, were consistent with agency goals regarding disaster response or sub-disaster response. One specific mission is to pair up regions and recognize that any region, city or county may reach a point where they don't have enough resources in the midst of recover and response. Therefore, we've paired up sister regions to plan and exercise together. In that particular bill, we may not require additional resources, since that is the nature of preparedness and response. There are other bills that require more thought to ensure that we propose initiatives that improve public health in the border region.

Mr. Daniel Esparza expressed how "outside the box" thinking may create successful state and local interventions. We can marry them with statutory programs to address issues administratively. We should learn how to rewrite bills that fit the mission of the agency and build the statutory mission and purpose to provide a better state response to the bills and recommendations that are being developed.



Commissioner Gruber mentioned that we'll continue to work to ensure contact with federal officials when appropriate so that we compliment the medical component. Mr. Olivarez commented that Task Force members should also keep in mind that there is a lot of misinformation regarding the concept of a border health task force. Considering the current political environment, we should educate others in a proactive manner, not a reactive manner, to inform how border public health safety and security impacts the rest of our state.

Agenda Item VI: **Lunch** commenced at 11:20 a.m.

**Agenda Item VII: Updates of TFBHO Maternal and Child Health Priority
Recommendations Objectives and Action Plan**

Dr. Gonzalez reconvened the meeting and asked Mr. Perez to resume his presentation with Dr. Prot's input on the Adolescent Health Survey, which included medical societies and other partners. Mr. Olivarez and Dr. Gonzales spoke of expanding the survey to gather more data and include other medical professionals. Mr. Perez also informed members about changes to data collection during Operation Lone Star (OLS) 2019. Texas A&M is planning on providing tele-counseling services at future OLS events.

Dr. Gonzalez mentioned his conversations with Drs. Prot and Ringsdorf regarding Maternal and Child Health including stress pregnancies, especially with young mothers. He also mentioned the rising sexually transmitted infection rates, prenatal care and postpartum care.

Dr. Rodriguez commented about the importance of this issue, especially when one considers how the border region was affected by the Zika Virus. He also spoke of the issue that runs parallel with it, which is that of tire disposal, since water in tires exacerbates mosquito proliferation, which lead to mosquito-borne illnesses.

Agenda Item VIII: Workgroup Action Plan Updates

Dr. Gonzalez asked Task Force members input if they had comments any of the other public health priorities:

Environmental Health

Mr. Olivarez spoke of the waiver regarding insecticide applications and how it may require implementation of related trainings and licensures for mosquito application. Mr. Ramirez spoke about how crucial this was, especially during a public health emergency. Dr. Ramirez suggested that research take place to ensure next steps are in line with other agencies, such as the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ), etc.

Dr. Gonzalez encourage members to work together with OBPH in analyzing SB 1312. He also mentioned getting ahead by considering resistance to certain insecticides. Mr. Olivarez mentioned the recent State of Texas Active Response to Zika and how initial findings showed that about 65% of mosquitoes showed resistance to certain insecticides. He explained that the Texas Department of Agriculture controls the licensing portion of the



issue and while TCEQ handles others. He, Mr. Kotsatos, Dr. Rodriguez and Mr. Ramirez expressed that it will be crucial to work with other agencies to ensure success.

Dr. Dutton commented on the vector-related efforts with UTRGV and the expansion of the Laboratory and Infectious Disease Surveillance (LIDS) Program.

Communicable Diseases

Dr. Gonzalez mentioned that this priority was being led by Dr. Prot. Mr. Olivarez mentioned there he was part of that work group and that he had briefly spoken to Dr. Prot but felt it could be covered at the next meeting.

Dr. Dutton spoke of OBPH submitting a grant application for expanding the Border Infectious Disease Surveillance Program. Region 9/10 has an existing program that we'd like to expand to the other border regions due to renewed funding. It could enhance different positions regarding environmental and infectious disease surveillance, including a binational component.

Chronic Diseases

Dr. Gonzalez expressed that he's worked with Dr. Prot and other members on this priority. He expressed that degenerative diseases weren't being addressed in our initial report. There are cultural and genetic factors that we can discuss to integrate with new border-centric data, including behavioral health elements.

Dr. Rodriguez mentioned that he sees more dialysis centers than I see Stripes, a local convenient store chain, which is extremely concerning. We must elaborate on this issue moving forward.

Dr. Dutton also mentioned issues on this priority topic related to the grant and other sources of funding to improve public health in the border region.

Border Public Health Infrastructure

Dr. Gonzalez mentioned that there were some bills introduced based on this topic. We'll have to take appropriate preventive action on this topic.

Mr. Olivarez spoke on the issue of expanding lab capacity and moving forward with that assessment, that some legislators were interested in the matter, but time simply ran out. However, he thanked many DSHS staff for stepping up to the plate to strengthen and develop lab capacity border-wide.

Ms. Imelda Garcia, Associate Commissioner of Laboratory and Infectious Disease Services, spoke of the Epidemiology and Laboratory Capacity grant application that is still in process. We hope to announce later this summer on where we are in that process. She mentioned that funds to improve the state public health lab in Harlingen were approved, which should benefit the south Texas border. There are plans to build an additional room for bio-safety level III incidents, which should improve TB capacity. There are also plans to increase staff to help handle the increased volume to support local health departments. We'll be working



with Mr. Gruber and Dr. Dutton to complete a lab assessment to improve border lab capacity.

Mr. Olivarez thanked Ms. Garcia, Commissioner Hellerstedt and the DSHS Executive Team for their work and expressed his gratitude for the improvement in resources, accessibility and communication within the last year as a result of this Task Force.

Dr. Rodriguez asked if there were any alignments that had to occur to help her with the assessment. She stated that continued communication was critical to pinpoint the stress point along the border to address them appropriately. While Task Force meetings are a good venue to discuss such issues, don't wait to communicate related concerns so that we continue to move forward with this goal, whether it be about a particular disease response or an outbreak. We'll always do what we can to make our teams available. We'll continue to work with you all on the development of the survey relating to the assessment to ensure we're asking the right questions to produce a true assessment of needs in the border region. For example, we might prioritize differently than that of what locals consider a priority, so we'll continue to collaborate. Dr. Rodriguez thanked her for her time and dedication.

Dr. Gonzalez thanked everyone for their continued diligence in improving capacity.

Agenda Item IX: Timelines, Next Steps, Announcements

Task Force members suggested that February 20, 2020 be considered for the first Task Force meeting for 1½ days. They requested that Mr. John Villarreal send e-mails to Task Force members to secure all meeting dates for 2020.

Mr. Olivarez referenced the possibility of meeting in other locations understanding the web capacity issue. Mrs. Francesca Kupper noted that the issue was one of equipment and vendors as well but will explore the possibility.

Dr. Gonzalez asked members if there were any topics that needed to be addressed at the next meeting in September, including administrative rules in lieu of legislation. Mr. Olivarez agreed and expressed the potential to handle priority recommendations creatively and collaboratively to accomplish common goals and not wait for legislative action. Mr. Olivarez also suggested that we put Drs. Prot and Ringsdorf reports back on the agenda.

Mrs. Kupper mentioned the previously agreed upon workplans and expressed the idea of a report back from Operation Lone Star, the CHW/Promotores Conference, and Adolescent Summit since they would have concluded by the next meeting.

Dr. Rodriguez also mentioned the classification of local health departments and used the example of codified employee positions, such as that of a librarian, as opposed to a public health position. It's a conversation we should have to make efforts to move public health forward.



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Dr. Gonzalez agreed on bringing the subject matter back to the table to discuss the future of public health at the local level in its relation to state collaborative efforts. Mr. Ramirez agreed that it is a local challenge that is worth discussing. The city of Harlingen has operated with the same amount of staff for the last 25 years. Population health is worth looking discussing.

Dr. Rodriguez suggest that a local public health committee be established if it is permitted so that such a committee can work with the state to improve local public health.

Agenda Item X: Public Comment

There was no public comment.

Agenda Item XI: Adjourn and Thank you

Dr. Gonzalez thanked members for their attendance and adjourned the meeting.