**APPROVED** MINUTES OF THE PUBLIC HEALTH COUNCIL

Meeting of July 8, 2020

MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

**PUBLIC HEALTH COUNCIL**

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**250 Washington Street, Boston MA**

**Docket: \*\*\*REMOTE MEETING\*\*\* Wednesday, July 8, 2020 – 9:00AM**

***Note: The July Public Health Council meeting will be held remotely as a video conference due to the COVID-19 State of Emergency declared by Governor Charles D. Baker on March 10, 2020 and consistent with the Governor’s March 12, 2020 Order modifying the state’s Open Meeting Law and July 2, 2020 Order regarding gatherings.***

Members of the public may listen to the meeting proceedings by using the dial in information below:

Join by Web: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89699334279>

Dial in Telephone Number: 1-646-558-8656

Participant Passcode: 896 9933 4279

1. **ROUTINE ITEMS** 
   1. Introductions
   2. Updates from Commissioner Monica Bharel, MD, MPH.
   3. Record of the Public Health Council Meeting held June 10, 2020. **(Vote)**
2. **PRESENTATIONS**
   1. Overview of Massachusetts’ COVID-19 Response in Long-Term Care Facilities.
   2. DPH COVID-19 Health Equity Advisory Group: Recommendations, Data Release, & DPH Response.
   3. Informational presentation on Tick-borne Disease Surveillance in Massachusetts.

*The Commissioner and the Public Health Council are defined by law as constituting the Department of Public Health. The Council has one regular meeting per month. These meetings are open to public attendance except when the Council meets in Executive Session. The Council’s meetings are not hearings, nor do members of the public have a right to speak or address the Council. The docket will indicate whether or not floor discussions are anticipated. For purposes of fairness since the regular meeting is not a hearing and is not advertised as such, presentations from the floor may require delaying a decision until a subsequent meeting.*

Public Health Council

Attendance and Summary of Votes:

Presented below is a summary of the meeting, including time-keeping, attendance and votes cast.

Date of Meeting: July 8, 2020

Start Time: 9:11AM Ending Time: 11:13AM

| Board Member | Attended | First Order: Approval of June 10, 2020 Meeting Minutes (Vote) |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Commissioner Monica Bharel | Yes | Yes |
| Edward Bernstein | Yes | Yes |
| Lissette Blondet | Absent | Absent |
| Derek Brindisi | Yes | Yes |
| Kathleen Carey | Yes | Yes |
| Sec. Elizabeth Chen | Yes | Yes |
| Harold Cox | Yes | Yes |
| John Cunningham | Yes | Yes |
| Michele David | Yes | Yes |
| Michael Kneeland | Yes | Yes |
| Keith Hovan | Yes | Yes |
| Joanna Lambert | Yes | Abstain |
| Acting Secretary Cheryl Poppe | Yes | Abstain |
| Lucilia Prates-Ramos | Absent | Absent |
| Summary | 12 Members Present; 2 Absent | 10 Members Approved; 2 Absent; 2 Abstained |

**PROCEEDINGS**

A regular meeting of the Massachusetts Department of Public Health’s Public Health Council (M.G.L. c. 17, §§ 1, 3) was held on Wednesday, July 8, 2020 by the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, 250 Washington Street, Boston, Massachusetts 02108.

Members present were: Edward Bernstein, MD; Monica Bharel, MD, MPH; Derek Brindisi; Kathleen Carey, PhD; Secretary Elizabeth Chen; Harold Cox; John Cunningham, PhD; Michele David, MD; Keith Hovan; Michael Kneeland, MD; Joanna Lambert; and Acting Secretary Cheryl Poppe.

Absent members were: Lissette Blondet and Lucilia Prates-Ramos.

Also in attendance was Margret Cooke, General Counsel at the Massachusetts Department of Public Health.

Commissioner Bharel called the meeting to order at 9:11AM and made opening remarks before reviewing the agenda.

**1. ROUTINE ITEMS**

b. Updates from Commissioner Monica Bharel, MD, MPH

Commissioner Bharel gave Council members an update on Eastern Equine Encephalitis, or EEE, in Massachusetts. She also updated the council on COVID-19’s impact on the Commonwealth and the status of the state’s reopening, and gave an update on the Heath Equity Advisory Group’s work and recommendations. Commissioner Bharel concluded her remarks with a reminder to continue to wear face coverings, social distance, and continue good hand hygiene to prevent a resurgence of COVID-19. She then opened the meeting to questions or comments from the Council.

Dr. David asked what is happening in the prison system related to COVID-19 and decarceration efforts for non-violent offenders.

Commissioner Bharel indicated case numbers in correctional facilities are now posted and noted DPH collaboration with the corrections system on the public health pieces, such as infection control and testing.

Dr. Bernstein described race and ethnicity data by age group from the Brookings institute and how pronounced the impact of COVID-19 is on young minority groups in particular, indicating among those aged 45-54, for example Black and Hispanic/Latino death rates are at least six times higher than for whites. He noted there is such a focus on comorbidities impacting higher rates of COVID-19 death, instead of systemic racism; whereas these deaths in younger groups highlight racism.

Commissioner Bharel agreed with Dr. Bernstein’s concerns, and noted the Health Equity Advisory Group presentation does show age adjusted death rates by race and ethnicity.

**1. ROUTINE ITEMS**

c. Record of the Public Health Council June 10, 2020 Meeting (Vote).

Commissioner Bharel asked if any members have any changes to be included in the June 2020 meeting minutes.

Seeing none, Commissioner Bharel then asked for a motion to accept the minutes. Dr. Bernstein made the motion, which was seconded by Secretary Ureña. All other present members approved.

**2. PRESENTATIONS**

a. Overview of Massachusetts’ COVID-19 Response in Long-Term Care Facilities.

Commissioner Bharel invites Kate Fillo, PhD, Director of Quality Improvement for the Bureau of Health Care Safety and Quality to present on the Commonwealth’s response to COVID-19 in long-term care facilities. Dr. Fillo gave an overview of these efforts to the Council. Upon conclusion of the presentation, Commissioner Bharel opened the meeting to questions from Council members.

Acting Secretary Poppe noted there appeared to be a significant amount of personal protective equipment (PPE) allocated to assisted living residences (ALRs) in Southeastern Massachusetts, and asked if this was because there are more ALRs there or if there was more of a shortage there.

Dr. Fillo responded that the chart shows the total for each type of PPE dispersed in the region, instead of the total by facility type.

Dr. Bernstein commended the work and indicated it speaks to the state’s concern for elders. He then asked if Alzheimer units in ALRs were included in this surveillance.

Dr. Fillo responded that ALRs have epidemiological support from the Department in making infection control decisions and implementing measures and added that these facilities have factored in to guidance development related to COVID-19 for elder care settings and as part of reopening. She also added that ALRs are part of the congregate care surveillance testing strategy.

Dr. Bernstein noted there was no mention of the total number of deaths and testing in the slides and asked if that was available.

Dr. Fillo indicated the slides show the trends versus the total numbers, but the total numbers are reported in the Department’s daily dashboard. She indicated there were 23, 595 confirmed and probable cases associated with long-term care facilities (LTCFs) and indicated we would follow up with the current number of deaths from the daily dashboard.

Dr. Bernstein asked what the take home messages were from this experience.

Dr. Fillo noted this has been a collaborative effort across the administration, and that the in-person support and audits in facilities has been very effective. She noted the Department typically acts as the regulator and still fulfills this role, but also this has been a time where we’ve stepped in to play a more supportive role with LTCFs and ALRs for the safety of residents and healthcare workers.

**2. PRESENTATIONS**

b. DPH COVID-19 Health Equity Advisory Group: Recommendations, Data Release, & DPH Response.

Commissioner Bharel then invited Associate Commissioner Lindsey Tucker, Assistant Commissioner and Director of the Office of Population Health Abbie Averbach, MSc.; and Director of the Office of Health Equity Sabrina Selk, D.Sc. to present an overview of the COVID-19 Health Equity Advisory Group established in response to COVID-19 and as a way to provide recommendations on equitable access to care and services, prevent inequities and disproportionate negative outcomes, and to present that Group’s recommendations.

At the conclusion of the presentation, Commissioner Bharel invited questions from the Council Members.

Derek Brindisi left the meeting at 10:25AM and did not return.

Dean Cox applauded the Group’s work and appreciates that the recommendations highlight specific DPH actions, and acknowledged many recommendations are beyond DPH. He asked who those recommendations were for and how they would be translated into action and implemented.

Associate Commissioner Tucker responded that these recommendations are a call to action for all stakeholders in the public health and healthcare community and more broadly. She noted there are steps specific to DPH that the Department is actively working on, whether currently or planning for future action, and noted the Department would collaborate with others where possible and called for opportunities to collaborate through public-private partnerships.

Dean Cox noted these are great recommendations but wanted to understand who would be responsible for implementing so these do move forward.

Associate Commissioner Tucker responded that the group had not yet gotten to that level of work and at this point DPH is looking at the recommendations to see what we can do in response as an agency. She added that there are many expert groups and organizations in the Commonwealth who also may be able to use the recommendations to continue and further their own work. Associate Commissioner Tucker indicated the advisory group has cross-membership with some of these other external groups leading to key synergies across those groups.

Dean Cox concluded by saying he does look forward to seeing cross-sector steps to implement this report.

Associate Commissioner Tucker also requested suggestions for collaboration and implementation from members of the Council. Commissioner Bharel added that we do not plan to let this report sit and encourage Council Members to share and implement in their organizations as well.

Dr. David indicated she looks forward to seeing these recommendations and inter-state agency collaboration to make these recommendations more concrete in order to address the issues of health and racial inequities in our state.

Commissioner Bharel reiterated the Advisory Group’s charge to make targeted recommendations on what the Department could do to address these issues, and she noted that the Advisory Group’s recommendations will be presented at a meeting of cross-agency leadership as well to find additional connections and steps to implement the report’s recommendations.

Dr. Bernstein commented that around 10 years ago there was a meeting across all agencies regarding the opioid epidemic, and he suggested a similar approach could be taken regarding health equity and ensure the focus is beyond COVID-19.

Secretary Chen applauded the Advisory Group’s comprehensive work over a short period of time. She asked what the thought would be to extend these recommendations beyond state government but into communities and whether DPH views itself in a leadership role to galvanize support for the implementing these recommendations across the state.

Associate Commissioner Tucker responded that is a great suggestion, and we are working to continue to identify those opportunities through things such as the community survey that will be put out so we can better understand where those opportunities are and how to best engage groups and communities across the state.

Acting Secretary Poppe noted the importance of housing, as evidenced by the situation in Chelsea where many were displaced until the emergency housing in hotels was available. She also noted her organization has work to do regarding COVID-19’s impact among veterans, noting the number of deaths experienced by veterans and a need to continue to drill down into that data and better understand disparities there.

Dr. Bernstein noted that the impact of COVID-19 on young people points to the fact that they work in industries deemed essential with a higher exposure rate and vulnerability rate, and that those should also be examined to try and get to explanatory models behind the data.

Commissioner Bharel noted the new data law requires data to be broken down by occupation, and indicated the Department looks forward to collaborating with healthcare professionals about how to capture and report that information.

Dr. Bernstein observed that public transportation may be a place to help prepare people, such as by giving a mask prior to boarding any public transportation.

The Commissioner thanked the Council for their feedback and questions as the Department continues this very important work.

**2. PRESENTATIONS**

c. Informational presentation on Tick-borne Disease Surveillance in Massachusetts.

Commissioner Bharel invited Dr. Catherine Brown, State Epidemiologist and Veterinarian, to present on tick-borne disease surveillance in Massachusetts.

Dr. Bernstein left the meeting at 11:00AM and did not return.

After Dr. Brown’s presentation, Commissioner Bharel opened the meeting to questions from Council members. Seeing none, she reminded the Council the next meeting would be August 12, 2020 at 9AM, and asked members if there was a motion to adjourn. Dr. Cunningham made the motion, which was seconded by Secretary Chen. All present members approved.

The meeting adjourned at 11:13AM.