



**Task Force of Border Health Officials (TFBHO) Meeting  
HHSC Virtual Platform  
November 18, 2020**

Member Name	Yes	No	Professional Representatives (non-members)
Esmeralda Guajardo, MAHS	✓		
Richard Chamberlain, DrPH(c), MPH, RS	✓		
Steven M. Kotsatos, RS	✓		
Josh Ramirez, MPA, CPM	✓		
Eduardo Olivarez	✓		
Arturo Rodriguez, DNP, MPA, CPM	✓		
Angela Mora, M.A.Ed.	✓		
Emilie Prot, DO, MPH	✓		
Lillian Ringsdorf, MD, MPH	✓		
Rachel E. Sonne, MD, MPH	✓		
State Representative Bobby Guerra		✓	Represented by Stephanie Chiarello
Senator Eddie Lucio Jr.		✓	Represented by Daniel Esparza and Elsa Garza

**Attendees Present**

Francesca Kupper, John Villarreal, David Gruber, Dr. Paul Grunenwald, Dr. George Peck, Dr. Allison Banicki, Elsa Garza, Daniel Esparza, Alberto Perez, Adriana Corona-Luevanos, Gilberto Cedillo, Stephanie Chiarello, Jennifer Nguyen.

**Agenda Item I: Call to Order, Welcome, Chair Remarks, Logistical Announcements and TFBHO and Roll Call**

Chair Guajardo called the meeting to order at 1:02 pm and welcomed attendees to the Task Force of Border Health Officials (Task Force) meeting. Chair Guajardo introduced Ms. Francesca Kupper, facilitator of the meeting. She read open meeting and virtual platform guidelines. She completed the roll call to confirm a quorum. Chair Guajardo asked for HHSC/DSHS staff to introduce themselves and any others that also joined the virtual meeting and thanked all attendees for their attendance.

**Agenda Item II: Approval of October 30 Meeting Minutes**

Chair Guajardo stated that the October 30 Meeting Minutes were previously sent to members and asked to approve them. Ms. Angela Mora made a motion to accept the meeting minutes and Vice Chair Eddie Olivarez seconded the motion. Chair Guajardo asked Ms. Francesca Kupper to take a roll call vote to officially approve the minutes. The meeting minutes were approved.



**Agenda Item III: Update: Multi-disciplinary Response/Recovery Team (2018 Recommendation)/Rapid Local and Regional Support Plan (Senate Bill 1312 of the 86<sup>th</sup> Legislative Session)**

Chair Guajardo welcomed Drs. Grunenwald and Peck to the meeting. Dr. Grunenwald thanked Chair Guajardo and introduced himself as the Zoonosis Control Branch Manager and the State Public Health Veterinarian. He explained that he was relatively new to his position and because he's worked in Southeast Texas, he had an appreciation and respect for vector-related illnesses. He's stated that he's received briefings on different projects and that Dr. Peck was also involved with studies along the border and will defer to his colleagues at the regional level to speak of more of the rapid response plan.

Dr. Peck also mentioned that he was also rather new to his position and learning much about the different parts of Texas and the challenges with border-related projects. He referenced how portions of the restricted-use license as well as the trainings were being handled by the Texas Department of Agriculture. He also mentioned about the lab-related projects with UTRGV and local entities and the mosquito surveillance and support currently being done.

Dr. Grunenwald continued the conversation by stating that the state lab in Austin continues to process mosquitoes collected from traps along the border and continues to look at surveillance for individual mosquito species. He briefly mentioned the regional rapid response plan and the briefings leading up to this meeting including a guidance document on how locals respond to post-flooding events. He explained how the actual plan would have to be started at the regional level, depending on what's already in place. The current local plans will be shared with Center for Health Emergency Response Section and the Zoonosis Control Branch. All three will collaborate looking for commonality and gaps to ensure completion of the plan. He invited for Regional and Local Health Services Staff to include their perspective.

Associate Commissioner for Regional Health Operations David Gruber spoke of the collaborative project beginning with border regions to draft a document in support of SB 1312, including resource support processes. He also asked if any members had any specific requests in support of the bill.

Chair Guajardo thanked Mr. Gruber. Vice-chair Olivarez also thanked Senator Lucio and his staff, along with the south Texas delegation regarding the passing of this bill. It has helped border regions with post-flooding events.

**Agenda Item IV: Report: Each Subcommittee Group reports on top COVID-19 response recommendations**

Chair Guajardo opened the discussion and explained that border public health recommendations per subcommittee will be sent to Dr. Hellerstedt. Members discussed the different issues per subcommittee/public health priority.



### **Infrastructure: Laboratory Capacity**

- Complete the laboratory survey and expand it to include capabilities for laboratories to report results and positivity rates directly to LHDs (Walgreens, CVS, etc.)
- Establish local laboratory and testing capabilities that is regularly available and accessible, low to no cost to include university agreements and state labs
- Require implementation of Health Information Exchange with free access for providers and public health
- Support strategies to improve coordination with Mexico

### **Chronic Diseases**

- Childhood obesity prevention and education
- Involve the School Health Advisory Council in the school response plans to communicable disease reporting/outbreaks, including COVID-19

### **Environmental Health**

- Conduct a school survey on ventilation and A/C in coordination with TEA.

### **Maternal and Child Health**

- Add COVID-19 surveillance of premature births to the Birth Defects Program at DSHS.
- Add COVID-19 to the Adult Safety Net with the Texas Vaccines for Children Program
- Uphold vaccination requirements for school entry and add COVID-19 vaccine when available
- Support sharing medical knowledge and training of border health professionals in coordination with the Texas Medical Association and the Border Health Caucus.
- Establish and fund outreach to pregnant mothers that are more at risk of early delivery and complications due to COVID-19 infection.

### **Communicable Diseases**

- OBPH Community Health Workers training curriculum and bilingual educational material to expand into pandemic response, including mental health
- Establish response team with trained and bilingual staff, including contact tracers
- Implement mechanism to ensure local health departments have resources to address COVID-19 vaccination needs for the high number of uninsured and MUA areas along the border
- Involve the School Health Advisory Council in the school response plans to communicable disease reporting/outbreaks, including COVID-19 and school ventilation, disinfection issues, food safety/preparation and preventative measures

### **TFBHO COVID-19 Recommendations –**

#### **Border Public Health Resourcing**

- Representation on task force/committees established by DSHS and involving LHDs



### **COVID-19 Funding Allocation**

- Prioritize funding based on access to care and MUA versus population;
- Increase number of public health professionals (epidemiologists, sanitarians, microbiologists, nurses); making these permanent
- Establish response plan to address deficiencies of funding impact
- Evaluate avenues to support hospitals, nursing homes and long term acute care centers in hiring temporary medical staff in the border region.
- Allow COVID-19 funding to support technological purchases to prevent gatherings such as televised youth sports in schools.

### **Communications**

- Establishment of Vulnerable Person's Database to address medical/food/supply/housing shortage
- Address the important of adhering to public health order
- Address COVID Fatigue

**Agenda Item V:** Finalize and approve response recommendations  
Chair Guajardo thanked members for their input and suggested that the current recommendations be reviewed and revised if necessary then be approved via vote at the next meeting. Vice-chair Olivarez agreed and stated that a polished product should be approved at the next meeting with the goal of having the letter submitted to Commissioner Hellerstedt by the first week of January 2021 with copies to Senator Lucio, Representative Guerra and the Texas House Border Caucus.

Chair Guajardo asked members if they agreed or had other suggestions. All members agreed and thought that submitting the letter after the holidays would be a good time to submit the letter of recommendations. Chair Guajardo asked Ms. Kupper if a vote was required for this decision. Ms. Kupper explained that all members agreed with the decision and a motion for a vote was not necessary. Chair Guajardo thanked Ms. Kupper and suggested that they carry on as planned with official vote for approval of the letter of recommendations at the next meeting on December 10.

**Agenda Item VI:** Public Comment

Chair Guajardo asked Ms. Kupper if there were any public comments. Ms. Kupper confirmed that there were no public comments registered.

**Agenda Item VII:** Planning for next meeting, Closing Remarks, Adjourn and Thank you

Chair Guajardo explained that the letter of recommendations would be polished and finalized for a vote at the next meeting. She also recommended that a vaccine update be provided at the next meeting with an emphasis on vaccines that will be available for those without health insurance among border populations. Mr. Villarreal expressed that members start to think of potential meeting dates for 2021 so that a consensus decision is made on



future meeting dates. Chair Guajardo asked if there were any special requirements for future meetings. He explained that, to his knowledge, the mandate would return to SB 1680 requiring members to meet quarterly. Chair Guajardo asked members to look at their calendars and suggested that the first meeting be held in February of 2021 and that the issue could be discussed in the December meeting.

Dr. Rodriguez suggested that prospective bills affecting border public health can be discussed in future meetings. Chair Guajardo thanked Dr. Rodriguez and agreed that his suggestion would be wise to discuss a plan of action to address them at the next meeting. Dr. Rodriguez suggested that much like the vaccine updates, border public health-related bills should be running agenda items for future meetings. Chair Guajardo agreed and wished everyone a happy Thanksgiving holiday and let Ms. Mora know that thoughts and prayers are with her and the people of El Paso that have been recently been heavily impacted by the pandemic and that she should reach out to members if she should need assistance with anything. She expressed that same sentiment to other members as well and adjourned the meeting.