

CITY OF PHILADELPHIA
DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH
MEETING OF THE BOARD OF HEALTH

Thursday, October 10, 2024

The Philadelphia Board of Health held a public meeting on Thursday, October 10, 2024. The meeting was held virtually using the Zoom platform to facilitate access by the public via computer or other device and toll-free phone number.

Board Members Present

Dr. Frank Franklin, Dr. Usama Bilal, Dr. Ana Diez-Roux, Dr. Marla Gold, Dr. Jennifer Ibrahim, Dr. Amid Ismail, Dr. Scott McNeal

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

Interim Health Commissioner and Board President Frank Franklin PhD, JD, MPH, FCPP called the meeting to order at 6:34 PM.

PRESENTATION BY DR. FRANK FRANKLIN

Dr. Franklin stated he would begin the meeting by addressing the Department's priorities and then would open the floor for questions and discussion. Dr. Franklin acknowledged difficulties in scheduling individual meetings with board members prior to this public meeting. Dr. Franklin highlighted several departmental priority areas, including organizational competencies, operational responsiveness, programmatic alignment with foundational capabilities and internal culture, and equity.

Dr. Franklin described four substantial drivers of the health of Philadelphia: injury (particularly fatal and non-fatal firearms events), substance use disorder (fatal and non-fatal overdose events), chronic disease conditions (metabolic syndromes, heart and cerebrovascular conditions, cancer and asthma), and infectious diseases (HIV, respiratory illness, STI, and tuberculosis). The Department is looking for ways to address these issues with departmental resources in the communities with the highest needs. During the COVID-19 pandemic, and other emergency situations, siloes break down for cross-functional response teams, but then silos return after the emergency. Dr. Franklin stated his belief that the Department should move towards operating consistently with cross-functional teams, even in non-emergent situations. There is population and geographical overlap in Philadelphia across the four drivers of health. Treating these areas as silos can lead to disjointed delivery of services. Dr. Franklin said he wants the Department to make sure we have robust integration of the assessment of programmatic intervention and service delivery to address collective wellbeing.

Two years ago the Department received a public health infrastructure grant to enhance workforce development, foundational capabilities, and data modernization.

Workforce development involves recruitment, skill-building opportunities for staff, workforce wellness, and preparedness, particularly for the Division of Disease Control (DDC). In addition, the grant assists with the development of policy and legislative affairs, communications, community partnerships, civic engagement, and equity. Data modernization includes three objectives: data infrastructure improvements, strengthening data governance, and increasing staff training and capacity.

Dr. Franklin announced that this week the Department received a \$7 million award for a lead and healthy home grant. The Department is working to incubate a community health worker model. During the COVID-19 pandemic the Department set up five resource hubs across the city. These hubs have become a way for the Department to connect more directly to the community. The funding for the resource hubs was initially tied to COVID-19 funding, but Dr. Franklin has found a way to continue operating them with different funding sources. The Department has received \$2.3 million for immunization information systems. The Department is also working as a strategic partner with the School District of Philadelphia as they develop school-based health centers.

Dr. Franklin concluded his remarks by asking the board members if they had any questions.

QUESTIONS FROM BOARD MEMBERS

Dr. McNeal thanked Dr. Franklin for his presentation and advised that the Board still needs to vote to approve the minutes from the last meeting. He asked Dr. Franklin to explain the role of the Board of Health for the members of the public present. Dr. Franklin said the Board of Health is broadly involved with the Department's priorities with a primary focus on policy and regulatory activities to address health issues in Philadelphia. Board members also provide feedback and consultation on the Department's initiatives, including equity and civic engagement.

APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES FROM MEETING ON 1.25.2024

Dr. Franklin asked if the Board reviewed the minutes from the public meeting on January 25, 2024. The board members confirmed they had. Dr. Franklin asked if there were any questions about the minutes. Dr. Franklin requested a motion to approve the minutes. Dr. Ismail moved and Dr. Ibrahim seconded. The motion was approved unanimously.

PUBLIC COMMENT EXPLANATION

Mr. Ben Hartung of the Philadelphia Department of Public Health (PDPH) reviewed the public comment process and provided notice that this meeting is being recorded and will be posted publicly.

OPEN DISCUSSION

Dr. Ismail noted the Department's partnership with the School District of Philadelphia and explained that two years ago Temple Dental School opened a 4-chair dental clinic at William

Kelly elementary school, which also serves several other schools in the area. Dr. Ismail is visiting Widener elementary school for physically disabled students tomorrow. Dr. Ismail stated that there is a need to support students in the Philadelphia School District and he would like to collaborate with the Department to develop a school-based care, prevention, and promotion model for children and their caregivers. Dr. Franklin agreed with Dr. Ismail. Dr. Franklin said that he met with the School District of Philadelphia Medical Director, Dr. Kendra McDow, and Superintendent Watlington and they told him the history of school-based health centers in Philadelphia. Dr. Franklin said they are continuing to discuss how these initiatives can work.

Dr. Franklin asked Dr. Ismail about the process of setting up the dental clinic. Dr. Ismail explained that he first connected with president of the School Board, who connected Dr. Ismail to the superintendent who then identified an interested principal. It took five years of work to get a clinic on the ground in the school. All the cost is paid by Temple Dental School. Dr. Ismail said that utilization of the clinic is increasing as trust is built and that caregivers have been added to the model. Dr. Ismail said that he is meeting with officials of the school board tomorrow to show them the clinic and hopes to discuss expanding the clinic to Widener elementary school.

Dr. Gold thanked Dr. Franklin for his presentation and did not have questions about the information presented. Dr. Gold had questions about the overall health of Philadelphians and how the Board will receive information about the Department's priority programs. Dr. Gold stated the importance of continued work while the city's preparedness infrastructure is built up. Dr. Gold said that the Board does not currently have a "sense of the whole" to understand the big issues facing Philadelphians. Dr. Gold mentioned wanting to understand the Department's role in activities in Kensington, the Mayor's clean and green initiative, the proposed arena development in Chinatown, and substance abuse issues.

Dr. Franklin noted that the Department is still releasing information about the health of the city. The Department recently issued a press release about the reduction in deaths related to substance use. Homicide deaths are down from their numbers during the COVID-19 pandemic. Dr. Franklin mentioned that the Health of the City dashboard is publicly available. Dr. Franklin acknowledged that there has not been much direct communication with board members since the mayoral transition. Dr. Franklin explained that he has been getting organized and up to speed. Dr. Franklin said that moving forward the Board will meet quarterly and that board members will be provided with information ahead of those meetings.

Dr. Ibrahim stated that the last time the Board convened was at the end of January 2024. Dr. Ibrahim said that she had reviewed strategic plan for 2022 to 2026 and acknowledged that a progress report was released in February or March. Dr. Ibrahim asked for time to process the progress made on the strategic plan together to identify successes and challenges and to allow board members to bring their expertise to the issues. Dr. Ibrahim asked that, in the near term, board meetings be held more regularly than quarterly to allow the Board to get caught up with the Department's key initiatives. Dr. Ibrahim also said it would be helpful to receive progress reports on the Department's key initiatives. Dr. Ibrahim expressed the desire to have conversations and discussions to support the Department. Dr. Franklin thanked Dr. Ibrahim for the recommendation and said that he would take it into consideration.

Dr. Ibrahim flagged Kensington as an issue that needs discussion and stated that more frequent meetings would allow for more deep, thoughtful discussions.

PRESENTATION BY CRYSTAL YATES-GALE, MBA

Ms. Crystal Yates-Gale, MBA, Deputy Managing Director for Health and Human Services, introduced herself to the board members and offered updates on the mayor's initiatives and the process of communicating about them to the board members. Ms. Yates-Gales expressed two big priorities: creating a more cohesive working relationship between departments in the HHS cluster and addressing the needs of Philadelphia's growing aging population to be ready to properly serve their needs.

Ms. Yates-Gale explained that Mayor Parker is very deliberate about how messaging is made public and that the mayor does not want anyone to get ahead of her. Ms. Yates-Gale cautioned against believing everything published in the news. Ms. Yates-Gale explained that the clean and green initiative included a program to clean every city block over the summer and that there is a dashboard that can be shared. The mayor thinks of "green" as both beautification and sustainability. Dr. Ismail stated that people are noticing the city is getting cleaner. Ms. Yates-Gale said she also has noticed this and is interested in understanding if it is sustainable.

Ms. Yates-Gale stated that a wellness ecosystem is being built out to address the issues facing Kensington. A low-barrier shelter was opened at 2100 W. Girard Avenue, named Philly House at Girard. Ms. Yates-Gale acknowledged receiving significant push back from community residents about this initiative. Ms. Yates-Gale understands the need to engage the community prior to such initiatives in the future. The community was unaware that there was a shelter already operating at the site with a capacity of 130 people. A new 90-bed floor was created and most people in the facility are coming off the street in Kensington. There are currently 73 people in the shelter, including 3 couples. There are no other shelters in the city accepting couples. Ms. Yates-Gale said there are plans to expand the facility to another floor with an additional 90 beds, which should be completed soon. There have been questions about the admissions process for Philly House at Girard. There are no walk-ups allowed; participants are identified through outreach coordinators. Ms. Yates-Gale announced that construction will soon start 24 hours a day, 7 days a week at Riverview campus on State Road to create the Riverview Wellness Village. The mayor would like to open the village to patients on December 31. It will be a sober-living community, not a lower-barrier shelter.

Ms. Yates-Gale said that the Department of Behavioral Health and Intellectual disAbility Services is working with behavioral health and substance use treatment providers to understand the availability of treatment beds. Ms. Yates-Gale noted these treatment providers have expressed the ability to increase treatment bed capacity, but that there is not currently voluntary demand for treatment. On a typical day, there are 100 available beds across all levels of American Society of Addiction Medicine (ASAM) treatment. There will be a meeting with treatment providers soon because the Office of Public Safety will be starting a wellness court. Ms. Yates-Gale anticipates there will be a need to increase bed capacity to deal with a surge in treatment demand. Ms. Yates-Gale explained that admission to the Riverview Wellness Village

after completion of treatment will be a “carrot” that will include continued outpatient substance use treatment, employment programs, and housing support.

Dr. Gold asked if there is a role for needle exchange embedded somewhere in these programs. Ms. Yates-Gale said need exchange will continue along Kensington Avenue with providers already doing it, but that the City of Philadelphia will not provide funding for needle exchange. The mayor has asked the philanthropic community to fund needle exchange programs. Ms. Yates-Gale said there is no needle exchange at Philly House at Girard and that the Riverview Wellness Village will be a drug-free facility.

Dr. Ibrahim asked for more information about the wellness court. Ms. Yates-Gale asked if there was a specific question because she was determining what could be made public. Dr. Ibrahim asked about how it would work generally. Ms. Yates-Gale recommended that this topic be discussed at another meeting when more can be explained. Ms. Yates Gale said that if someone is arrested on Kensington Avenue for open drug use or drug paraphernalia possession, they will be allowed to choose treatment instead of incarceration at a special court session held once or twice a week. Dr. Ibrahim asked if there is wound care at the city facilities. Ms. Yates-Gale confirmed that Philly House at Girard has wound care and that there will be wound care and primary care at Riverview Wellness Village.

Addressing Chinatown, Ms. Yates-Gale asked for clarification about Dr. Gold’s concerns. Dr. Gold said she had not seen much reported about the projected health impacts of the arena’s development on the residents. Dr. Gold explained that board members are used to incubating ideas with city leaders and noted the various areas of board member expertise. Dr. Gold said that the board members would typically have conversations about the development of an idea like a wellness court to be able to advise about similar programs that have been tried in the past. Dr. Gold stated that she was trying to understand the new flow of information. Ms. Yates-Gale said she believes the administration will get back to this type of communication with the Board. Ms. Yates-Gale explained that the mayor has trepidation about how communication happens because some initiatives have gotten out to the public before the mayor would have liked. Ms. Yates-Gale said that she would continue to reach out and work with the board members and Dr. Franklin in their areas of expertise.

Dr. Gold asked about the impacts of the proposed arena in Chinatown. Ms. Yates-Gale said that independent reports were commissioned by the mayor, but acknowledged she did not think they included health-related data. Ms. Yates-Gale said she would look to see if any of the reports included health-related data that could be shared.

Dr. Bilal raised the issue of motor vehicle crashes, which are the 7th leading cause of premature mortality in Philadelphia. Dr. Bilal explained that he commutes by bicycle and is always worried about the environment around him while biking. He noted there have been several bicyclist deaths recently and that the budget was cut for Vision Zero last year. Dr. Bilal noted that the road diet proposal for Washington Avenue was only partially implemented. Dr. Bilal asked about the Department’s role in addressing pedestrians, bicyclist, and all roadway injury and death. Dr. Franklin responded that the Department’s work on this issue sits in the Injury Prevention Program within the Division of Chronic Disease and Injury Prevention. Injury epidemiologists in

the Department have investigated pedestrian crashes. Dr. Franklin said the Department is working with the Bloomberg Institute to try to support this work and drive policy in the future. Dr. Franklin offered to share some of this work with Dr. Bilal. Dr. Franklin mentioned he is an injury epidemiologist by training.

Dr. McNeal raised the issue of healthcare worker leave policies that were adopted during the COVID-19 pandemic. Dr. McNeal said that there has been some confusion in the healthcare community about whether the policy was still in effect. Dr. McNeal noted that the prior health commissioner stated that the leave policy needed to be changed through an act of legislation. Dr. McNeal inquired if the policy will be changed.

Mr. Hartung responded that City Council is aware of this issue and could address it soon. Dr. Franklin said that he had also been contacted about the policy and that he also expects the policy to be addressed soon.

Dr. Gold noted that she had sent Dr. Franklin and other board members a list of issues she wants to discuss, including bird flu. Dr. Gold requested updates about the city's readiness plans for the next pandemic. Dr. Gold explained that after the tragedy of September 11th the city's preparedness plan was based on "points of distribution" (PODS). The Department used to hold drills with universities and other large institutions, which acted as points of distribution. Dr. Gold noted that the PODS system was supposed to be reviewed and reformed. Dr. Gold noted that the likelihood of another pandemic or large-scale event is exceedingly high. Dr. Gold acknowledged the difference in the current flow of information to the board and expressed that board members want to fulfill their role under the City Charter. Dr. Gold requested board sessions on the transmission of airborne disease and the city's readiness plans.

Dr. Franklin said there would be both public meetings and private non-deliberate meetings with board members in the future.

Dr. Franklin asked if there were any more questions. Dr. Ibrahim asked about the next steps for scheduling meetings. Dr. Franklin said the first step is to set quarterly meeting dates and then additional meetings can be scheduled as needed, either public or private. Dr. Diez Roux asked Dr. Franklin to share the information about bicycle injury with all board members and be a topic for discussion at a future meeting.

ADJOURNMENT

Dr. Franklin adjourned the meeting at 7:28 p.m.