

## ***Southern Berkshire Public Health Collaborative***

Serving the Towns of Alford, Great Barrington, Lee, Lenox, Monterey, Mount Washington, New Marlborough, Otis, Sheffield, and Stockbridge

### **November 12, 2021 Monthly Meeting**

**Via Remote Zoom and in-person**

**9:00 AM**

**Present In Person:** Pat Levine (Sheffield), Rebecca Jurczyk (Great Barrington), Dianne Romeo (Lenox), Brandi Page (Otis), Scott McFarland (New Marlborough), Martin Mitsoff (Sheffield) Jim Wilusz (TTHD), Amt Hardt (SBPHC)

**Present Remotely:** Jayne Smith (Alford), Clarence Fanto (Berkshire Eagle), Andrea Goodman (Berkshire Edge), Juliette Haas (Egremont), Mike Hugo (MAHB)

#### **1. Administrative Items**

- a. **Review and Approve October 8, 2021 Minutes (ACTION ITEM):** Diane Romeo made motion to accept, Jim Wilusz seconded the motion- Motion Passed unanimously

#### **2. Updates**

- a. **SBRSD Update:** Public Health Nurses and SBPHC reps are meeting with SBRSD monthly and building relationships. Jill is doing contact tracing. Amy and Jill had hosted a Q/A with pediatricians for parents regarding the vaccination for 5–12-year-old children. They are in the process of scheduling another session. Rebecca Jurczyk suggested to invite other school districts to attend vs. having multiple school districts host individual meetings. Discussion ensued about the SBRSD's letter asking whether LBOH will be taking action on adding COVID-19 to the list of required vaccinations for school children. Jayne Smith reported that Alford's SB/BOH decided they would support the school district if they chose to require
- b. **Communication Plan with BPHA:** A standing monthly meeting has been set up between BPHA and SBPHC with the first meeting is December 3<sup>rd</sup>. The benefits of having a standard meeting are two-fold- 1) it will improve communication regarding grants and opportunities to collaborate; and 2) it will also show funders that we are communicating.
- c. **FDA Update:** Jayne gave an update on the FDA grants. With SBPHC being asked by BPHA to not apply for a bigger 3-year all-encompassing grant, it meant that we instead had to cobble together several 1-year grants under several towns. The grant applications include funding for education of staff/BOH, education of food establishments, evaluation of paperwork and administrative systems and resources to conduct a risk -factor study in most of the towns. The total applied for was approximately \$45,000 total. Pat Levine suggested that we include funding to provide quarterly training to both the towns and industry. This idea was met with enthusiasm by the group and Jayne said she would strive towards making that happen.
- d. **Shared Services Coordinator Posting:** Jim Wilusz discussed the need for a shared services coordinator to expand capacity of SBPHC and ensure it is successful. Jim has posted a job description for 20-24 hours a week, of which 10-hours will be the shared services

coordinator duties and 14 hours/week will be under the auspices of TTHD. This is thought that this will be enough to get things up and running properly.

**Mike Hugo** attended the meeting and offered updates on the PHE grants. He spoke about SAPHE funding- so far, the Senate has passed 250 million over 5-years and the house passed 150 million over 3-years. They have not yet reconciled the bill and he was going to make a lot of calls after our meeting. He reiterated that the PHE can be flexible help pay for salary and benefits for a shared services coordinator and staff, which may be in short supply given the PHE grant has created 100 new nursing positions and a surging need of shared service coordinators. Some PHE grantees are looking at working together to share a shared service coordinator.

There was discussion that some grant recipients were offering significantly higher salaries than the municipalities could compete with, and that there was concern that it was going to impact the morale and longevity of existing staff in otherwise functioning health departments. While there is room in ARPA money to pay premium wages to staff, many towns are not investing that money in public health at all and are instead focusing on infrastructure.

Mike explained that one of the advantages to the SAPHE money is that it will be given directly to Boards of Health and that the opportunity to siphon the money away from public health won't exist.

Both Mike Hugo and Cheryl Sbarra will be at the next meeting to discuss our IMA. The SBPHC thanked Mike for his time and work supporting local public health.

### **3. Public Health Nursing Updates**

**COVID:** COVID cases have plateaued at high-level county-wide and will likely increase, meaning the PHN will be busy with contact tracing. In response, the state has changed the model starting to allow PHN to call once vs calling multiple times. Also, starting in January, the contact tracing will be focused on specific sites such as schools, nursing homes, etc. This change will allow for more time to focus on disseminating information through direct messaging and websites. To meet each town's needs, Amy asked if they could give feedback from each town so the PHN team could better understand what each town shares, how we share it, and how we can ensure we are reaching all populations.

**FLU Vaccination Clinics:** Successful Flu booster clinics were offered through our partnership with CHP. There will likely be another round offered in all the towns. SBPHC collaborate and supported 1-2 flu/booster clinics in all the towns and not planning to offer any more. Local groups like Senior Centers can directly schedule additional clinics with the CHP mobile unit.

**Pediatric COVID Vaccination Clinics:** Starting the previous week, pediatric clinics are being offered at all public elementary schools across the County in collaboration with BPHA and Fairview.

**Weekly Updates:** The weekly updates have been well-received, and people have given feedback that they feel more informed about their options and what is happening locally.

**Vaccine Administrative Site:** Both Amy and Jill continue to work on the administrative requirements of becoming a vaccination site as well and purchasing required equipment. We are not sure what will happen in spring, and we need to be ready and available. It has been a surprise at how difficult the process of becoming a vaccine provider is and how expensive private-purchase vaccine is (\$26,000 for 600 doses) to get up and running. While there is reimbursement, the reimbursement takes time- which is why we are gathering funds for the initial purchase of vaccine and equipment.

Heather Barbieri announced this month that Fairview will no longer be hosting clinics in 2022 due to the increased capacity in the region. Heather has long provided vaccine clinics to many of the local elementary schools in Southern Berkshire County as well as public drive thru flu clinics and (of course) the COVID clinics for South County. She is a great resource and will be missed. We will work with Heather to learn how many vaccines we should count on to ensure we get the proper orders in.

**COVID Discussion:** There was discussion on where we are at with COVID in comparison with last year. Amy explained that the cases are a lot higher now than they were last year (and are probably higher than are being officially reported due to at-home tests) but that the key factor is to look at how the hospitals are doing, since the vaccine is keeping instances of serious illness low. Currently, the hospitals in Berkshire County are not overwhelmed which is the goal.

#### 4. **Group Values and Mission Statement**

- **HOMEWORK:** Make suggestions to abbreviate draft mission from October 8<sup>th</sup> Meeting:

**OLD VERSION:** *The mission of the Southern Berkshire Public Health Collaborative is to provide public health services that directly impact and improve the quality of life in the towns we serve. We strive to bridge accessibility barriers and to promote health and wellness through collaborations and partnerships.*

**REVISED:** *“The mission of the Southern Berkshire Public Health Collaborative is to leverage partnerships in order to provide quality public health services that directly improve the health and well being of the entire community.”*

Jim Wilusz made the motion to accept the revised mission statement, Diane Romeo seconded. Mission Statement was unanimously approved.

Pat and Rebecca volunteered to meet with the graphic designer to work on a corresponding logo that will reflect our mission statement.

## 5. Member Discussion/ Updates

**Egremont:** Juliette Haas thanked Collaborative for inviting Egremont to the table. While Egremont is a full Alliance town, they look forward to working with us towards collaboration and inclusion.

Group was glad Egremont was present, and we will continue to work to quantify the work being done and educate stakeholders so that they understand and value how we lift each other up.

**Great Barrington:** Rebecca had a call from a local business who was concerned they had been given a fake vaccination card by one of the businesses' employees. What would we all do? Discussion ensued about what can be done if/when this continues to pop up. It is ultimately an employer issue, and the employer should speak to their lawyer and see if they can ask for further documentation or not.

**Google Group:** Jayne asked whether the group would be interested in forming a "Google Group" to discuss subjects as they pop up. There was interest from the group, and it was thought that it would not be a quorum issue if we were not speaking about the group policies and such. We would just need to be careful to not use identifiers and remain aware that it would be subject to a public records request. It will be added to the December agenda for discussion.

## 6. Next Meeting Date/Focus

- December 10<sup>th</sup>, 2021/ IMA Focus: Goal is to create a town-friendly IMA

Motion to adjourn made by Jim Wilusz, Rebecca Jurczyk seconded. Meeting Adjourned at 10:15AM.