

Whatcom County Council as the Health Board

**COUNTY COURTHOUSE
311 Grand Avenue, Ste #105
Bellingham, WA 98225-4038
(360) 778-5010**



Minutes - Final

Tuesday, April 1, 2025

10 AM

Hybrid Meeting - Council Chambers

**JOINT HEALTH BOARD/PUBLIC HEALTH ADVISORY BOARD MEETING -
HYBRID MEETING (PARTICIPATE IN-PERSON, SEE REMOTE JOIN
INSTRUCTIONS AT www.whatcomcounty.us/joinvirtualcouncil OR CALL
360.778.5010)**

COUNCILMEMBERS

Barry Buchanan
Tyler Byrd
Todd Donovan
Ben Elenbaas
Kaylee Galloway
Jon Scanlon
Mark Stremmer

CLERK OF THE COUNCIL

Cathy Halka, AICP, CMC

Call To Order

Health Board Chair Jon Scanlon called the meeting to order at 10:03 a.m. in a hybrid meeting.

Roll Call - Health Board

Present: 7 - Barry Buchanan, Tyler Byrd, Todd Donovan, Ben Elenbaas, Kaylee Galloway, Jon Scanlon, and Mark Stremler

Roll Call - PHAB

PHAB Members Present:

Jon Scanlon
Amy Harley
Ashley Thomasson
Chris Kobdish
Christine Espina
Emily O'Connor
Guy Occhiogrosso
Joni Hensley
Julie Terry
Kelli Carroll
Kendra Cristelli
Lara Welker
Leah Wainman
Madison Emry
Rachel McGarrity
Robyn Phillips-Madson
Shannon Boustead
Shu-Ling Zhao
Sterling Chick
Sue Rogers

Announcements**Public Comment**

The following people spoke:

- Natalie Chavez
- Brian Estes

Hearing no one else, Scanlon closed the Public Comment period.

Special Presentation

1. AB2025-271 Update from Health Director and Health Officer

Charlene Ramont, Interim Health Director, recognized that there have been a lot of changes and she intends to be a source of stability for Whatcom County Health and Community Services (WCHCS). Ramont provided an overview of upcoming presentations to councilmembers. On April 15, there will be a community health and human services division update and an update on Healthy Children's Fund spending and program evaluation. On April 29, there will be a fentanyl plan program evaluation and update. A severe weather shelter year-end review will also be presented soon.

Dr. Amy Harley, Health Officer, provided information regarding measles. Harley stated that measles cases in the United States are on the rise. A major outbreak is centered in western Texas, though there are cases in other states, including Washington. Measles is one of the most infectious known viruses and spreads easily in communities with low immunity. There have been two measles deaths associated with the current outbreak. Children under the age of five are at a high risk. Measles can have severe consequences such as pneumonia, brain inflammation, and death. Harley stated that WCHCS is committed to responding quickly to measles cases, but a large-scale outbreak could overwhelm the community's healthcare resources. The MMR vaccine series, if completed, is 97% effective against measles. Harley asked that PHAB and Health Board members share reliable information sources regarding vaccines, such as local and state health departments, and the academic institutions such as the Vaccine Education Center, the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, and professional societies such as the American Academy of Pediatrics.

Health Board and PHAB members asked questions and discussed immunization for measles and COVID-19.

This agenda item was PRESENTED.

2. AB2025-278 Presentation from the Executive Office regarding the process to fill the Health and Community Services Director position

Whatcom County Deputy Executive Kayla Schott-Bresler stated that the county is experiencing a leadership transition in WCHCS. She spoke about a draft recruitment plan (on file) outlining the leadership transition, and she requested participation and feedback from the Health Board, PHAB, WCHCS staff, and community stakeholders.

Schott-Bresler outlined the transition plan, stating that a professional recruiter and facilitator will be brought in to assist with the hiring process for a new WCHCS director. Expectations for the job description will be

refined with WCHCS, PHAB, and Health Board members. The job will be posted widely and will involve a national search. After initial screening, an internal interview process will begin, followed by the convening of panels with WCHCS staff, PHAB, and Health Board members as well as other stakeholders. Eventually, PHAB and the Health Board will submit a formal recommendation. The Executive will conduct a final interview with the candidate and the County Council will be asked to confirm the appointment. Motions will be needed from the Health Board regarding membership and participation on the interview panel.

Donovan asked about the timeline for the hiring process.

Schott-Bresler said the full process will take several months, though the Executive Office is moving quickly.

Scanlon asked how many Health Board members are needed to participate on the interview panel.

Schott-Bresler stated that two to three members may participate in the process, and she defers to the Health Board's judgment.

Leah Wainman, PHAB, asked for clarification about PHAB's role in the recruitment process.

Schott-Bresler clarified that PHAB members will be able to provide input regarding the process at the next PHAB meeting. She stated that there is some flexibility in the process, and there are some rules and regulations laid out in County Code relating to how the next WCHCS director is hired; other aspects of the process are dictated by policies agreed upon by PHAB.

Elenbaas asked for clarification around the role of interview panel members and their ability to provide input on the process.

Schott-Bresler said she understood Councilmember Elenbaas' point that it is beneficial to compare multiple candidates and they will strive to meet that expectation.

Scanlon asked whether Health Board members would like to vote on interview panel membership.

Byrd stated that the Health Board should wait until a future meeting to appoint members to the interview panel.

This agenda item was PRESENTED.

3. AB2025-274 Presentation from the Joint Public Health Advisory Board/Health Board Structure Working Group

Working Group members Kelli Carroll (PHAB), Dr. Christine Espina (PHAB), Joni Hensley (PHAB), and Scanlon shared a presentation (on file) regarding recommended changes to Health Board membership. The presentation covered the following:

- *Changes to RCW regarding local Boards of Health (BOH)*

Scanlon provided background on the working group, which began in 2024 following a vote by the Health Board to explore changes to Board membership (**AB2024-708**).

Carroll stated that the working group is recommending an expansion of the Whatcom County Board of Health pursuant to RCW 70.05.035 following the requirements specifying membership components. Carroll said that it is important that the duties of PHAB continue if the working group's recommendation is implemented.

Espina provided an overview of House Bill 1152, which passed in 2021 and required local health boards to expand unless they met certain criteria. Added health board membership categories included: public health/medical expertise; community member/partner; lived experience; and Tribal government.

- *Working Group process*

Carroll provided an overview of the working group's process. Members gathered and synthesized data, conducted interviews with six county boards of health, collected and reviewed high level input from a digital community survey, generated key observations, shared and discussed an initial draft recommendation with PHAB, drafted the final recommendation, and ultimately received unanimous approval from PHAB.

Scanlon shared information about the working group's findings from other counties. Elected officials in other counties reported feeling they had quicker access to information from subject matter experts as a result of the expanded health board membership. Other county officials shared that the diversity resulting from expanded board composition provides a broader perspective. Scanlon added that a robust onboarding process is important, as other counties reported

that elected officials sometimes dominated discussions.

Buchanan asked what counties were included in the research.

Scanlon stated that charter and non-charter counties were consulted. No significant differences were noted between the two types of governments.

Elenbaas said he remembered that Whatcom County was not required to change the Health Board's membership in 2022 because of grandfathering, and he asked whether a change now would be permanent.

Scanlon responded that such is his understanding.

Health Board and PHAB members discussed the process for changing Health Board membership.

Espina provided the sources that informed the working group's recommendation, which included a Washington State Association of Local Public Health Officials (WSALPHO) Presentation to County Council in November 2024, committees and commissions survey & report, National Academy of Medicine Report, 2023 Washington State After Action Report, a 2022 BERK Consulting Report regarding Whatcom County's Pandemic Response, and online survey results.

- *Rationale and pros and cons of maintaining existing structure versus implementing the recommendation*

Hensley restated the working group's recommendation to expand the Whatcom County Board of Health to include:

- Elected officials from other jurisdictions within Whatcom County
- Public health experts
- Tribal Representatives
- Other members as required by RCW 70.05.035.

Health Board and PHAB members discussed the working group's recommendation.

Carroll stated the rationale for the working group's

recommendation, which she said is reflective of the majority of survey respondents' feedback, provides for broader knowledge and expertise, enables direct communication with the community, expands the Health Board's capacity, and ensures the continuation of PHAB.

Scanlon outlined the pros and cons of both maintaining the existing Health Board structure and expanding its membership as recommended by the working group. The current structure provides electoral accountability, but members lack subject-matter expertise, and there is no representation for tribes or cities.

- *Plan for implementation and next steps*

Carroll described the potential next steps for the recommendation, which include legal review, County Council and Health Board decision points, and additional working group research and exploration.

Following the presentation, Health Board and PHAB members asked questions and engaged in discussion regarding next steps for the recommendation.

Buchanan asked for suggestions about forming a new joint working group.

Scanlon stated that the new working group should study the PHAB duties in Whatcom County Code as well as ordinances and code in other counties. The current working group consists of three Health Board members and four PHAB members.

Buchanan moved that they form a new workgroup to come up with some options and further recommendations to the Board of Health.

The motion was seconded by Donovan.

Wainman suggested that the Health Board could ask PHAB to convene community to receive feedback.

Health Board and PHAB members discussed Buchanan's motion.

The motion carried by the following vote:

Aye: 6 - Buchanan, Byrd, Donovan, Galloway, Scanlon, and Stremmler

Nay: 1 - Elenbaas

Scanlon asked for nominations of up to three Board of Health members for the new working group.

Buchanan moved to nominate Board of Health members Donovan, Scanlon, and Elenbaas to serve on the workgroup.

The motion was seconded by Byrd.

The motion carried by the following vote:

Aye: 7 - Donovan, Elenbaas, Galloway, Scanlon, Stremmer, Buchanan, and Byrd

Nay: 0

Scanlon asked for a nomination from PHAB members regarding membership on the new workgroup.

Health Board and PHAB members discussed the scope and composition of the new workgroup.

Emily O'Connor, PHAB, ***moved*** to recommend PHAB members to join the joint workgroup.

Carroll seconded the motion.

Shu-Ling Zhao, PHAB, ***proposed a friendly amendment*** that the vote on membership occur at the next PHAB meeting on April 17.

The motion to vote on working group membership at the next PHAB meeting on April 17 was approved by unanimous consent of PHAB members.

Health Board and PHAB members continued to discuss the scope of the new working group.

This agenda item was DISCUSSED AND MOTION(S) APPROVED.

MOTION 1: Motion approved 6-1 by the Health Board that they form a new workgroup to come up with some options and further recommendations to the Board of Health.

MOTION 2: Motion approved 7-0 by the Health Board to nominate Board of Health members Donovan, Scanlon, and Elenbaas to serve on the workgroup.

MOTION 3: Motion approved by majority of the Public Health Advisory Board that they recommend members to join the joint workgroup and that they do the election of those members at their next PHAB meeting on April 17th.

Other Business

Scanlon stated that PHAB members will be participating in a lobbying day on April 10.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 12:11 p.m.

The County Council approved these minutes on April 29, 2025.

ATTEST:



Cathy Halka, Council Clerk

WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL
WHATCOM COUNTY, WA



Jon Scanlon, Health Board Chair

Meeting Minutes prepared by Jenna Gernand