

**State Board of Health Subcommittee Meeting**  
**June 29, 2020 – 10:00 a.m.**  
**Virtual Meeting – WebEx**

Due to COVID-19, this meeting was conducted in an all-virtual environment.

**Members Present:** Faye Prichard; Gary Critzer; James Edmondson; Linda Hines, RN; Anna Jeng, ScD; Benita Miller, DDS; Stacey Swartz, PharmD.

**VDH Staff Present:** Joe Hilbert, Deputy Commissioner for Governmental and Regulatory Affairs; Mylam Ly, Policy Analyst; Alex Jansson, Policy Analyst; John Ringer, Director of Public Health Planning and Evaluation; Sable K. Nelson Dyer, JD, Acting Director, Office of Health Equity; Brenden Rivenbark, Senior Policy Analyst, Office of the Commissioner; Tammie Smith, Public Relations Coordinator; Richard Watson, Video Conference Engineer; Brad Bradley, Public Health Preparedness Systems Manager

**Call to Order**

Ms. Prichard called the meeting to order at 10:05 a.m.

**Introductions**

Ms. Prichard welcomed those in attendance to the meeting.

**Review of Agenda**

Mr. Hilbert reviewed the agenda.

**Health Equity Working Group – Overview**

Ms. Nelson Dyer presented an overview of the Health Equity Working Group. The working group is part of the COVID-19 Unified Command and is a cross-agency collaboration lead by Dr. Janice Underwood ( Governor’s Chief Diversity Officer), Ms. Nelson, and Mr. Curtis Brown (Virginia Department of Emergency Management) to identify, prioritize, and support issues and inclusion of marginalized and at-risk populations. There have been multiple activities and initiatives related to equity education, community engagement, and internal collaborations. Key staff include Dr. Rebecca Vargas-Jackson, who will assist with outreach particularly to Latinx communities, as well as three Harvard Fellows who are assisting in monitoring and developing equity at the three lead offices for the working group. Future cohorts of fellows will be monitoring and evaluating efforts towards equity.

There was discussion following the presentation around health equity activities beyond the scope of the COVID-19 response as well as how to do more action-oriented activities instead of studying the problems moving forward.

**VDH Health Policy Research, Analysis and Development Plan – Overview**

Mr. Rivenbark presented a brief overview of the Health Policy, Research, Analysis, and Development Plan (the Plan). The Plan has the goal of being developed in partnership with VDH staff and leadership, local health district directors, and the Commissioner’s Health Policy Advisory Council, as well as other key stakeholders. These groups help inform priority areas for

policy work throughout the agency, that are in line with the Governor's strategic priorities. The Plan will be revised moving forward to address what has been done, what still needs to be done, and identify other areas of policy development.

### **Public Comment Period**

Ms. Prichard invited members of the public to provide comments. No comments were provided.

### **Discussion of Potential Policy Recommendations**

Mr. Edmonson provided a brief overview of the draft memo that included "Examples of Recommendations that could be made to the VDH/General Assembly for funding". The table of suggested key focus areas, comprised of the following, was reviewed and discussed by the subcommittee:

- Diagnostic tests;
- Preparation for future disruptive situations/states of emergency;
- Vaccinations;
- Safe alternative methods of transportation;
- Protections against exposures; and
- Support the healthcare workforce and pipeline.

The first key focus area discussed was about the availability of testing and options for paying for increased COVID-19 testing as Virginia reopens. Dr. Swartz raised concerns about anxiety after someone tests positive, especially if they are deemed an essential worker. Dr. Jeng stated that VDH may have recommendations about what to do now, and the Board can then support allocations from the General Assembly.

The next key focus area discussed was preparation for the next pandemic, including the creation of a pandemic preparation taskforce. Ms. Hines pointed out that the Governor is already considering this. Dr. Miller suggested that the Board could help ensure that the workgroups are getting good feedback from stakeholders. Dr. Jeng stated that she understood the issue to be the strengthening of public health infrastructure, which is also underway, but it was good to add support to strengthening these areas. Another idea presented was to increase mechanisms of access to healthcare. The group discussed different barriers, especially in the southwestern part of Virginia, such as broadband, and opportunities to build on common locations to increase access (e.g. schools, clinics). This led to discussion that group leaders for these efforts need to be trusted in the community, which may mean that public health workers step back since they may not be a trusted voice.

The next focus area was vaccinations. The group discussed how as the COVID-19 response moved forward into the vaccine phase and flu season, there would be an increased need to depend upon local resources and rapid implementation, especially for those that do not have access to their usual providers. Ms. Hines also noted that childhood immunizations should also be included in any plans as children may not be in their usual schedule.

The group also discussed alternate methods of transportation to gain access to healthcare. Mr. Edmonson suggested options for public transit, or having doctors or hospitals pay for rideshare or cab services when the patient is unable to get to the office any other way. Ms. Nelson pointed

out that as far as healthy choices being the default choice, VDH was releasing ads to increase awareness of the benefits not just for oneself, but for those around them in the coming week.

The next key focus area was regarding Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). Mr. Edmonson stated that there was a need for PPE by individuals in low socioeconomic groups, minority groups, and other vulnerable populations. There was also a discussion that as Virginia moves forward and reopens, businesses, especially those such as gyms and other exercise facilities, must find ways to prove they are doing everything possible to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

The final focus area was the impact of COVID-19 on healthcare workers and their families, especially the elderly. There was discussion around the need for mental health services for the workers and opportunities to partner with faith-based organizations to provide access to support for individuals who may be resistant to more traditional mental health supports. Ms. Nelson Dyer reported that the Office of Health Equity is working on several different programs to address vulnerable populations including LGBTQ+ and victims of abuse who have been staying at homes with unsupportive or abusive family and partners. Ms. Prichard stated that these programs don't specifically address the physical isolation of elderly individuals who live alone and are declining. Ms. Nelson Dyer raised the point that congregate gatherings of elderly individuals is difficult since they are already a vulnerable population.

Ms. Prichard stated that one aspect that runs through all of the topics raised is communication. Throughout the topics, it was raised that there are other agencies or partners who can help lead and support public health messages or programs. Ms. Prichard stated that while the discussion around payment is important, the money from the CARES Act is largely gone or already spoken for and unavailable for new initiatives. Ms. Prichard stated that there may be non-monetary ways to help address some of these issues. Dr. Miller concurred, stating that an intentional shift in how we interact with or view other people can be beneficial.

### **Other Business**

Mr. Hilbert recommended that another meeting be held in mid-July. This meeting would serve as a further opportunity to develop policy recommendations to the Governor. Mr. Hilbert said further that the Board's recommendations to the Governor should include that VDH be directed to develop budget amendment requests to implement the Board's policy recommendations, and that the Administration look favorably upon those budget amendment requests.

Mr. Edmonson suggested that if we were able to provide more notice, there could be outreach to legislators to have them attend and hear the direction that the Board would like to take.

A Doodle poll will be sent the week following the meeting to determine the best date and time for the second meeting.

### **Adjourn**

Meeting adjourned at 12:39pm.

A recording of the full meeting can be found at this link: [https://youtu.be/\\_y7jIi1ct8k](https://youtu.be/_y7jIi1ct8k).