Multnomah County Public Health Advisory Board Minutes September 2021

Date: Thursday, September 23, 2021
Time: 3:30-5:30pm
Purpose: To advise the Public Health Division on several areas of work with a strong focus on ethics in public health practice and developing long-term public health approaches to address the leading causes of death and disability in Multnomah County.
Desired Outcomes:
1. Hear updates from board members
2. Receive background information on "responsible gatherings"
3. Deliberate on what "responsible gatherings" will look like when COVID-19 cases come down

Members Present: Becca Brownlee, Hanna Atenafu, Joannie Tang, Karen Wells, Tsering Sherpa, Mahad Hassan, Daniel Morris, Laurel Hansen, Arya Morman
Multnomah County Staff: Jessica Guernsey, Nathan Wickstrom, Nicole Buchanan, Adelle Adams
Public: Suzanne Hansche

Item/Action	Process	Lead
Welcome, Introductions, Agenda & Minutes Review	● Attendees introduced themselves and checked in with one another ● Meeting minutes from August were approved by consensus	Becca Brownlee

Public Comment & Board Sharing	● Rosewood is doing weekly vaccine clinics
	● Lutheran Refugee Services
	   ○ Grappling with the Haitian migration crisis at the border of Mexico and Texas
	   ○ We tend to deprioritize black immigrants, and the triggering border control treatment
	● Everyone is sorted into one category within OHA's rarest race category
	Action Items
	● Jessica and Tsering will connect offline regarding concerns about over-vaccination at Rosewood due to gift card incentives
	● Invite epidemiology staff to a future meeting to discuss OHA rarest race category
		Becca Brownlee

Background Review / Q&A	● State is actively considering a state-wide app that would be used to achieve the same goals we'll be talking about
	   ○ They have already talked to several culturally-specific groups
	   ○ They weren't able to share the written input yet, but Jessica can share that out when she gets it
	     ▪ She will receive the input by the end of next week
	   ○ This by no means is meant to be the answer to everything, but just one component
	   ○ The person that Jessica just talked to at the State was one of the people who worked on the vaccine website. She acknowledged that there are many changes needed
	     ▪ Language and technology / accessibility were major issues
	     ▪ Multnomah County had to come up with a cumbersome way to help fill in the gaps due to the statewide system being so inaccessible
	   ○ The Chair specifically asked for MCPHAB to weigh in on this decision
	   ○ Ethics conversations are not a yes/no
	     ▪ Purpose is to provide feedback, which will be elevated and used during the decision-making process
		Jessica Guernsey

Large Group Deliberation	● The board deliberated on the following question:
	   ○ **What are the equity impacts of a vaccine verification program, taking into consideration vaccination rates amongst BIPOC communities?**
	● When we're creating policies, we need to consider historical context
	   ○ Policies are steered around white supremacy
	   ○ Think about all of the policies impacting communities
	● Looking at the larger scope:
	   ○ People might not know about the vaccine, or have reasons for not wanting to receive the vaccine. When we enter spaces where vaccines are mandated, want to be culturally sensitive
	● Thinking in the vein of messaging to someone who has deficits in sensory perception
	   ○ How would we relay the information to them that is culturally sensitive and clear?
	● How do we relay that vaccine mandates are in everyone's best interest for protecting public health?
	   ○ Heard stories about people who wore masks, provided proof of entry, then took off
		All

- the mask after participating in the event
- Some businesses are already enforcing vaccine requirements
  - Just asking for pictures or card evidence
  - Honor system - fairly easy to forge cards
- Systems and databases - how do we verify that someone is who they said they are?
  - We use identification
  - At this point, we're using vaccine cards as ID - treading a fine line with HIPAA
  - Should continue to lobby for a federal database; it's unfair that local jurisdictions should have to foot the bill
  - We could do a little more deep diving to lobby upward, and not locally
  - More intimidating to ask business owners to ask for IDs
    - There are different levels that we have to consider
- For those who are unable to be vaccinated, are they allowed to be in those places of business?
  - I would think legally they are unable to prevent people from entering - ADA pathway
  - Good question - in practice, this could be challenging
- Folks can potentially have anaphylaxis reactions to all of the available COVID vaccines
  - Even though the populations are going to be small, we should consider those unable to be vaccinated based on medical advice
  - According to other jurisdictions, businesses would have to make accommodations for people with medical and religious exemptions
  - Employees of covered businesses in other jurisdictions are required to be vaccinated
    - Would need to grapple with this policy question, as we don't have a similar requirement
- State-wide funded implementation of vaccine app
  - They have received input from culturally-specific groups similar to MCPHAB
  - Timeline: if it moves ahead, they would like it to be implemented in the next few months
- Canada also uses an app that you can upload verification into
  - If you're visiting, it can tell you if you were in contact with someone who had COVID-19
- Would the app only be for vaccine verification? Or would contact tracing elements be built in?
  - Have only heard that it would be a standalone thing
- Employee vaccination requirement is a really important part of this policy
  - Patrons dining indoors are taking their masks off, while employees are able to remain fully masked
  - Does that change anything around whether employees should also be required to be vaccinated?
    - Was thinking in terms of the Indoor Clean Air Act
  - Would be a tough one for our jurisdiction, because of the limited employee vaccine mandates in place
  - Appreciate the points around fair implementation
    - What kind of resources are going to be implemented?
    - Creates many opportunities for bad situations that could be avoided with some foresight and investment
- A lot of pressure on smaller businesses and organizations to take vaccine mandates on themselves
  - Would putting a policy in place encourage more people to get vaccinated, or would it deter people?
  - Recently seeing an increase in vaccinations, largely because it's been mandated by workplaces
- Would religions be involved in this? They hold places of great influence
- Moving upstream, it would be helpful to have accountability across the board
- App attached to a database - if that route is selected, hopefully there will be support for small businesses to have access to that product that isn't undermining their profit margins
  - When businesses are pushing for their patrons to become vaccinated and to be honest about vaccine status, we should keep support for the small businesses in mind
- Other jurisdictions all had apps, but also offered the ability to show a card as evidence
  - Recommendation that businesses not have to take on that power
  - Having the app is a pro because it doesn't create more anxiety to put people in positions that makes them feel superior to the situation

- ▪ Having an app that tells people they are exempt, without having to have them explain why they are exempt, is helpful
- ▪ Helps to reduce the need to get in so much information
  - ● There's a large list of people who are exempt
- ▪ It would be really simple to just log into the app
- ● App would create a digital inequity
  - o Would it be on the people themselves to show the app they have, or would they be showing the card they have?
  - o If we're already in a system with a card, could we just show our card and have them add us to the system?
- ● What kind of system would we be using?
  - o Have you seen the disparity in folks who don't have those kinds of IDs?
  - o State system is ALERT database
  - o We want to be flexible for those who are undocumented and don't have a photo ID
    - ▪ Could show a piece of mail as an alternative
    - ▪ Or could just use the vaccine cards received when vaccinated, though fraud would be easy
- ● How are we going to help those who don't have access to technology, like the houseless community?
  - o Need to make sure they aren't excluded
- ● Is there a way that the state could put a sticker on our ID, as another option?
- ● The app doesn't preclude the other ways you could verify vaccine status
  - o It's the app plus other ways, such as showing vaccine cards
- ● Presumably one of the benefits would be to encourage people to get vaccinated
  - o Put signage up at restaurants, etc. so that we can support businesses to implement the policy
  - o Provides information so that folks can get vaccinated and then come back
  - o Multnomah County could create signage with a QR code to show where to go for vaccines
  - o New York is promoting this as a vaccine incentive program - you could go to a concert the night of receiving your first dose
- ● It sounds like we're going the direction of an app, instead of moving towards policy; policy would put more of the onus on businesses to enforce
  - o There does need to be verification of proof, but that needs to be done in a way that's not debilitating to the exempt
- ● There's a policy around requiring vaccine verification, and then the operational side, which includes the development of an app
  - o It's a both and
- ● App is a way to mitigate equity implications of a policy
- ● Accessibility is a huge potential barrier
  - o Opportunity to improve on how things are being done currently
  - o There's room for accessibility improvement
- ● Can we ensure that there's a language communicated to businesses on how a person can access their business that's respectful?
  - o Need to make sure that we're respectful when telling a person they can't enter without proof
- ● Health equity implications
  - o The policy would result in more people of color being turned away from businesses, according to dashboard numbers
  - o Need to feel like communities aren't being policed around the efforts
    - ▪ There are already a lot of mandates in place
    - ▪ Estimate that only 50% of people are willing to give information around vaccination
    - ▪ A lot of work to be done
  - o Racial and ethnic groups aren't engaged in this policy effort on their own behalf
- ● Is a data analyst tracking information?
  - o We could bring back more information to MCPHAB; we're tracking a lot of data
- ● The board is wanting more input on data
- ● Communication and linguistic barriers need to be overcome
- ● Feedback on how we can support all backgrounds - how is that going to impact all of those populations?
- ● Comfortable about making suggestions when we have stronger data
- ● Main concern with the app is the access issue - it does resolve some language issues
- ● The board expressed strong conviction around data and advocacy
  - o At the same time, I don't want a lack of data to prevent us from having a forceful

	opinion
	● MCPHAB voted on two areas:
	   o Do you support Multnomah County moving forward with a policy?
	      ▪ 6 votes yes, 0 votes no
	   o Is developing an app for providing proof of vaccination the right way to proceed?
	      ▪ 7 votes yes, 0 votes no
	● Mahad abstained from voting
	● **The board approved moving forward on the policy and app**
	● Advocacy - Do we take Arya's document as a starting point for providing a written recommendation?
	● We always have data constraints
	   o We spend a lot of time on this issue
	   o What are the asks around data?
	● If we can think about historical context, there are primary things that come up all the time that aren't considered
	   o We want to make sure that we have a response to this issue
	   o Other states are already more advanced on this issue than us
	● What is the data that we need to determine if we move forward?
	   o Looking for data that gives more color and context, which isn't currently being collected
	   o The data we are collecting doesn't address the equity concerns we have
	   o What is the data we want in this situation?
	      ▪ BIPOC communities have been disproportionately impacted in terms of infection and death
	      ▪ A vaccine verification program would help people decide to get vaccinated, as well as get more information, I see that as a positive
	● We can bring in our epi staff to understand the landscape locally
	● Need to be intentional around data collection
	   o Use an equity lens during analysis
	● For future Ethics Committee meetings, the board should walk through the 5PS document more deliberately, going through each question in order to ensure an equity lens is used during the deliberation
	Actions:
	● Arya will share her Google Doc draft with Nathan, who will send it to the rest of the board
	● Jessica will hear from the State next week and will share the input received from other advisory groups with MCPHAB
	● Send data needs to Nathan and Jessica so that they can request epi staff to join for a future meeting
	● Jessica will check in with Nathan on timeline for submitting board recommendations	

Wrap-up and Meeting Evaluation	● Meeting adjourned at 5:30pm
	● Chat comments:
	   o Laurel:
	      ▪ Agree that we need to be mindful of another means to "check" or police could again set up disparity of power.
	      ▪ Again I also continue to be worried about the people who CAN do these activities and the person working at these activities and the exposer of the staff who depend on these jobs and might not have job provided time off if get COVID exposure
	   o Daniel:
	      ▪ Would this policy require every employee of these businesses to be vaccinated?
	   o Arya:
	      ▪ My recommendation is for this policy to be transitioned higher up for funding to produce a business database this would decrease the need to request cards. Long-term solution
	      ▪ Requesting the Proof of Vaccination might be okay across racial and ethnic groups depending on how this proof is obtained. The app sounds great.
	   o Daniel:
	      ▪ It seems like if the purpose is to provide spaces where only vaccinated people will be, it'd be important for employees to also be vaccinated
	   o Joannie:
	      ▪ I think that this would help support businesses in the longer term as well as potentially increase vaccination rates. If vaccination proof ends up being done via app, what alternatives will be used for those who don't
		Becca Brownlee

have the technology?

- o Daniel:
  - ▪ Tom Frieden's article on verification is worth a read
- o Tsering:
  - ▪ I personally know of few people who have bought vaccine cards
- o Tsering:
  - ▪ I wonder if businesses can apply for grants administered by OHA to get support in this realm
- o Mahad:
  - ▪ Getting an Oregon ID is incredibly cumbersome, especially for houseless and folks who are criminal justice involved, they need verification documents that are hard to get a hold of.
- o Becca:
  - ▪ To add, it is hard with COVID to get ID swiftly too
- o Mahad:
  - ▪ App piece can be tricky if you're English language learner, so we may need to partner with communities to do this right
  - ▪ Is OHA tracking vaccination rates based on immigration/refugee status?
- o Daniel:
  - ▪ No, that information isn't tracked
- o Becca:
  - ▪ Only race/ethnicity is tracked
- o Mahad:
  - ▪ Maybe we need more data on this…
- o Daniel:
  - ▪ I think it's unlikely we'll have any better data anytime soon
- o Becca:
  - ▪ We seem to have strong convictions on better data - perhaps opportunity for further advocacy beyond a deliberation
- o Joannie:
  - ▪ I'm a yes on moving forward with this
- o Mahad:
  - ▪ The idea of verification by private business is tricky for me - it's a minefield and the app concept done in right manner could work
- o Becca:
  - ▪ Yes, Mahad. A lot of things that would need to go right, be addressed equitably, etc to make the yes feel like a good move
- o Mahad:
  - ▪ I am not comfortable with the whole idea of "the data is what it is"
- o Hanna:
  - ▪ I agree
  - ▪ I think we can continue to advocate for the data collection as a board. Can we have folks from epi come and provide feedback?
- o Arya:
  - ▪ When I say "the data is what it is" I am pointing to the lack of data collection
- o Daniel:
  - ▪ I wonder if there are opportunities for the county to work with community groups it funds to help them quantify what % of their members/clients are vaccinated?
- o Arya:
  - ▪ Sounds like there are many different ways data is being collected
  - ▪ Yes Hanna, ethical lens is important
- o Mahad:
  - ▪ My question above all else will this vaccination verification process be harder on certain communities than others?
- o Arya:
  - ▪ @Mahad in the document I listed a few different populations impacted. It would be awesome for you and others to add on!
  - ▪ @Becca, I can work with Nathan and you surrounding language after we have timeline confirmation