

STATE HEALTH COUNCIL

February 6, 2023

A meeting of the State Health Council (SHC) was called to order by State Health Council Chair, Sherry Adams at 10 a.m. on Monday, February 6, 2023 via videoconference with seven of the nine council members present.

Members present:

Sherry Adams, Dickinson
Darrold Bertsch, Beulah
Dr. Daniel Churchill, Bismarck
Mary Gumke, Watford City
Dr. Missy Henke, Bismarck
Dr. Carrie Ann Ranum, Hettinger
Dr. Mark Strand, Fargo

Members absent:

Kevin Dauphinais, Fort Totten
Kristin Roers, Bismarck

Staff members present:

Dr. Nizar Wehbi, State Health Officer
Dirk Wilke, Executive Director, Public Health
Beth Carlson, Deputy State Veterinarian, Department of Agriculture
Kalee Werner, Primary Care Office
Dr. Tracy Miller, State Epidemiologist
Kim Mertz, Director, Healthy & Safe Communities
Stacy Alexander, Director of Biothreat, Laboratory Services
Nicole Weigel, Testing and Collection
Miranda Oothoudt, Recording Secretary

Minutes

Dr. Carrie Ann Ranum moved the approval of the October 31, 2022 minutes as distributed. Second by Dan Churchill. Dr. Mark Strand stated that he had an amendment to the minutes as follows:

The motion, made, second, and approved, was correct in the minutes that a "request be made for funding for two people in the amount of \$20,000/year/person, which is comparable to that of behavioral health counseling." But in fact, it should read "request be made for funding for two people per year, in the amount of \$4000/year/person, not to exceed \$20,000 per person over five years."

There was no further discussion and the motion to approve the minutes of the October 31, 2022 minutes as distributed passed with no dissent.

Student Loan Repayment Program

Kalee Werner, Primary Care Office Manager, discussed the State Loan Repayment program beginning with a recipient that is requesting a site transfer from the Badlands Human Service Center to Open Range Counseling, which is also located in Dickinson. The move does not affect the population served. Dr. Mark Strand moved to approve the requested site change and Missy Henke seconded it. After a rollcall vote, the MOTION CARRIED with 7 yeas and 0 nays.

Dr. Beth Carlson, Deputy State Veterinarian, presented the applications for the Veterinarian Loan Repayment Program. There were five applicants and three awards were available. The scoring committee recommended that the awards go to Dr. Nathan Ziemann, Dr. Marissa Soderberg and Dr. Taylor Storhoff. Dr. Dan Churchill entertained a motion to approve the top three scoring applications. Missy Henke seconded the motion. By a roll call vote, the MOTION CARRIED with 7 yeas and 0 nays.

Legislation Related to the Role of the State Health Council

Darrold Bertsch updated the Council on Senate Bill 2227 which relates to the restructuring of the State Health Council and the job description. It provides for membership of the State Health Council to include a public health representative named by the State Health Officer; the State Health Officer; a representative from tribal health, UND, NDSU; and also an individual from each of the different service types including pharmacies, hospitals, long-term care, nursing, public health, etc. The bill is currently in committee and a first reading has taken place.

Dr. Mark Strand elaborated on SB 2227 showing where the bill can be found online and where council members can go to view testimony that's been given on the bill.

Dr. Mark Strand then discussed Senate Bill 2344 sponsored by Sen. Kristen Roers which adds Public Health as a category into the Student Loan Repayment Program. Matthew Schmidt from the ND Department of Health and Human Services did a twelve-question workforce survey of the 28 ND Local Public Health Units. Of the 28 units, 26 responded to the survey showing what position in public health are most difficult to recruit and which are most difficult to retain. The top response by far was nurses, followed by administrators and then those employed in environmental health. Low wages and compensation were identified as the largest challenge to recruiting and retaining qualified talent. Almost 70% of the respondents stated that they would take advantage of a public health student loan repayment program. An additional 27% stated that they didn't know if they would use it and only one respondent said that he or she would not take advantage of it.

This bill has not been heard yet, but it's been put forward to the Human Services Committee.

State Health Officer Update

Dr. Wehbi reported that the focus of his update relates to the legislative session. The Department of Health merged with the Department of Human Services in September of 2022, but each legacy department was asked by the Appropriations Committee to submit separate budgets. The budget of the legacy Department of Health is currently going through the House appropriations process and the budget of the legacy Department of Human Services is currently working its way through the Senate appropriations process. So far, everything has moved through smoothly and the committees have been very supportive.

Regarding policy, there are several bills that have been introduced that affect the work done by Health and Human Services. Just to name a few, there are seven bills related to vaccinations, a few related to medical marijuana, one on safety belts and another on raw milk. There are also some bills with technical changes that are intended to streamline operations.

He reported that there has been less focus on COVID and overall, our state is in a very good spot. COVID hospitalizations and severe cases are declining and overall, we are trending in the right direction. RSV also seems to have peaked and is now also trending downward.

Chairperson Adams noted that the next State Health Council meeting is scheduled for May 18th at 10 am CDT.

Darold Bertsch made a motion to adjourn and it was seconded by Missy Henke. A voice vote was taken and there was no opposition.

The meeting adjourned at 10:56 a.m.

Submitted,

Dr. Mark Strand, Secretary