



BOARD MEETING MINUTES

**By Remote Participation Pursuant to *An Act Extending Certain COVID-19 Measures*
*Adopted During the State of Emergency.***

Wednesday, June 11th, 2025

4:00 p.m.

Board Members Present

Dr. Taveras, Chair, Ms. Gutman, Ms. Laptiste, Mr. McLaren, Mr. Valdez

Chairperson's Remarks

Dr. Taveras: Good afternoon, fellow Board of Health members, Boston Public Health Commission staff, and members of the public. Welcome to the June meeting of the Boston Board of Health.

I would like to start by welcoming Stan McLaren as a new member of the Board of Health, following his appointment by Mayor Wu to fill the seat formerly held by Dr. Galea. Stan comes to us with an invaluable set of experiences that are so relevant to the work of the Board and Commission including his current role as CEO of Boston Health Care for the Homeless and his past leadership roles at Carney Hospital and Harvard Street Neighborhood Health Center. I think I speak for the Board when I say that we are excited to have you join us. Stan, would you like to say a few words?

Mr. McLaren: I just want to say thank you. I really appreciate being appointed by Mayor Wu and the opportunity to work with all of you. I've enjoyed working with many of you and I'm looking forward to this role. I'm a lifelong Bostonian, so this this really matters. This is an opportunity to really deal with the public health landscape of our community. I look at this as an extension of serving my neighbors and my family. I'm looking forward to this partnership. I look forward to us being able to protect the health and well-being of all Bostonians, and I'm deeply humbled and also honored to serve.

Dr. Taveras: We couldn't be more grateful for your leadership, both from the work that you've done up to now. We are huge fans of the Boston Healthcare for the Homeless Program, and know that you have our support and our well wishes as you take on yet a new leadership role.

This meeting is being conducted by remote participation as authorized by state law and any votes will be taken by a roll call.

In keeping with the Board's usual practice, members of the public are welcomed to observe the proceedings and Board staff will use the moderating features on the Zoom platform to keep all on mute other than Board members and BPHC presenters.

This afternoon, we will have a presentation and vote to approve BPHC's Fiscal Year '26 budget, and an overview of the 2025 Boston Community Health Needs Assessment.

Now I will turn it to Dr. Ojikutu for the Executive Office report.

Executive Office Report

Dr. Ojikutu: I want to start by also welcoming Stan to the Board and thank him for his willingness to serve the City in this way. We have gotten to spend a lot of time together over the past year where he made time to contribute critically important insights to the Carney Hospital closure process and working group. I appreciate his selfless commitment to serving his community in so many different ways. Welcome, Stan.

We are continuing our preparedness efforts to ensure internal situational awareness about ongoing changes in federal funding and policy. In this time of uncertainty for public health at the national level, here in Boston we remain focused on our mission: To work in partnership with communities to protect and promote the health and well-being of all Boston residents, especially those impacted by racism and systemic inequities. Following the leadership of Mayor Wu, we continue to focus our efforts on making Boston a healthy home for everyone.

We have been lucky so far in that our federal funding has not been significantly impacted yet. The termination of certain COVID-related CDC grants that impacted two of our grants was challenged in court and a preliminary injunction allowed us to restart that work

We are very concerned about the messaging on vaccination, and we are continuing to do everything we can to remain a trusted voice in community and to ensure residents understand the importance of vaccinations.

I do want to pause to acknowledge the bright spots that we have seen in our overdose death data, where we have seen a 38% decrease in opioid overdose mortality in Boston in 2024 compared to 2023. This is the lowest number of overdose deaths since 2015. As you know, Black and Latinx Boston residents, specifically men, have been disproportionately impacted by

opioid-related overdose deaths in recent years. In 2024, opioid-related mortality fell by 59% for Black men and 52% for Latino men. Overall, Black and Latinx residents experienced a 58% and 48% decrease, respectively.

I see this trend as a testament to our work and the way that we do it: in partnership and informed by the latest data about the problems we face and the effective solutions we need to leverage. At the same time, we acknowledge that much more work needs to be done to reach individuals actively experiencing substance use disorder. The goal of the City of Boston, across agencies, is to end congregate outdoor substance use citywide. The Boston Public Health Commission implements multi-layered strategies and programs to reduce overdoses, prevent the harms of drug use, increase access to substance use treatment. We play a key role in the substance use response in the City by providing low-threshold shelter and housing pathways, life-saving harm reduction services, and recovery services. This includes continuing low-threshold shelter and housing access, expanding treatment across access and pathways, maintaining active coordination with citywide response to address needs through the Recovery Services Street Outreach team, focusing harm reduction services at indoor locations, and expanding syringe removal and other clean up.

Since the Board last met, the Dorchester Working Group published its report and recommendations to Mayor Wu and Governor Healey. Our hope is that this document and the connections created by the group will help to advance positive solutions for this community, even as we face a challenging overall climate. That is available at boston.gov/carney.

In the infectious disease space, we are continuing preparedness and public communications efforts related to Measles. Our work has included: case monitoring of suspected measles cases, surveillance of suspected cases and measles vaccination data; public awareness (multilingual messaging/content, web, social media and with providers, community outreach and engagement, as well as vaccination access supply and clinic deployment strategies. We are continuing to leverage our role as a trusted source for information about a range of infectious disease and other issues, COVID-19 vaccination.

I am also excited to share some important recent additions to our team internally. Dr. Sanouri Ursprung has joined BPHC as Director of Public Health Science & Innovation. Dr. Ursprung comes to us from a career in equity-driven research and strategic leadership. After receiving her PhD in Clinical and Population Health Research from the University of Massachusetts Medical School, Dr. Ursprung led the Office of Statistics and Evaluation for the Bureau of Community Health and Prevention at the Massachusetts Department of Public Health for eight years, as Deputy Director and then Director, and most recently working as a public health strategy consultant. I want to thank Dr. Shoba Nair for her support during the interim period and continuation as a Senior Advisor.

I'm also happy to welcome Tom Fitzgerald as the new director of our Office of Public Health Preparedness. Tom brings a wealth experience in public health, emergency management, disaster response and recovery with roles in a variety of settings, including government agencies US Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Strategic Preparedness and Response, nonprofit organizations, and private sector companies on a range of disasters from wildfires and hurricanes and the COVID-19 response. I want to thank Leon Bethune and Beth Baker for all of their support during this interim period.

I also want to welcome Isaac Yablo to the Commission as our new Director of the Office of Violence Prevention. Isaac joins us from the Mayor's Office, where he serves as the Senior Advisor for Community Safety. Isaac is a scholar, researcher, and social justice advocate who has a passion for working to address the causes of violence. With this realignment, Isaac will also continue to serve as a Senior Advisor to Mayor Wu and we will incorporate the City's Community Safety work into BPHC's Office of Violence Prevention. I believe this is an opportunity to build Boston's capacity to prevent and address violence and provide services to the community in a stronger, more unified way. I want to thank Mark Scott for his support during this interim period and continuation as a senior advisor.

Last Tuesday, Mayor Wu announced the City of Boston's comprehensive Plan for a Safe, Healthy and Active Summer 2025 as part of the City's ongoing effort to address the root causes of violence through a public health approach, creating conditions for safety, peace and community healing, much of which includes positive youth programming offered by BPS, BPHC, and many others. More is online at boston.gov/summersafety

This month, we raise awareness about the importance of brain health and brain care throughout the lifespan, and honor those impacted by Alzheimer's disease and other dementias that have a major physical, emotional, social, and financial impact on individuals, caregivers and communities. Last Friday we launched a short video series on Alzheimer's disease and other dementias and practical ways to promote brain health at every age.

BPHC is enthusiastically observing Pride Month. Our organization is committed to supporting and celebrating Boston's diverse LGBTQ+ communities. residents. I'm excited to share that BPHC will be represented in the 2025 Boston Pride for the People Parade on Saturday, June 14th.

June is also Men's Health Month, we are hosting BPHC's first ever Men's Health Month Breakfast to create space for men at BPHC to be in community with one another, engage in a facilitated discussion regarding men's health and wellness, and to be recognized for their contributions.

I also want to thank our organizing committee that is organizing BPHC's Juneteenth events here at 1010 Massachusetts Ave and on our Mattapan Campus.

The Boston Parks Summer Fitness Series is back for the 2025 season! Classes run now until August 30. All 25 class are free, beginner friendly, and open to everybody. Classes are offered across Boston, both in-person and online, seeking to provide low-barrier opportunities for physical activity. The series is a partnership between BPHC, Parks and Recreation, and Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts.

We will hear more about the Budget from our Budget Director Chris Valdez shortly. On May 8th, we appeared before Council alongside Chief Hooley. I can share that across the Council, there is a tremendous amount of interest in the work that we do and support for out programs and staff.

You will also hear more about our just-completed 2025 Community Health Needs Assessment from Krystal and Tibrine, but I did want to pause to acknowledge them, Maya Nunez, the team from our Center for Public Health Science and Innovation, and many others who contributed. The report is now published at [Boston.gov/bphc-bostonchna](https://boston.gov/bphc-bostonchna). Boston is somewhat unique in that we do this work in community with a broad group of partners through Boston Community Health Collaborative, which we anchor. We look forward to continuing to leverage our best data and analytical capacity to focus our community health improvement planning and implementation on meaningful strategies to achieve our shared goals of advancing health equity and closing persistent life expectancy gaps.

On Saturday, June 21st BPHC is co-sponsoring Boston's first Walk for Health Equity with the Boys and Girls Club of Boston. This two-mile walk from Boston Common to Roxbury is a call to collective action to close the life expectancy gap in our city and other persistent health inequities. I look forward to strong showing from BPHC.

That is all. I welcome any questions.

Dr. Taveras: It is well deserved to see the media coverage, especially about overdose death decline, EMS facility, Carney. We are proud of your leadership. Thank you for that report and all of the work that you and the team continue to lead. We are incredibly proud of the work that is happening across the city.

Do we have any questions from the board.

Hearing no additional questions. I'd like to next introduce Budget Director Chris Valdez, to present the fiscal year 2026 budget. We will have Director Valdez present the budget, and then I will ask the Board to accept and vote after his presentation.

FY26 Budget Presentation and Vote

Mr. Chris Valdez presents FY26 Budget slides.

Dr. Taveras: Thank you. Do we have any questions from the Board?

Mr. Guale Valdez: Looking at the overview of the changes from March 12 to June 11, I notice line items changing. Can you explain those differences?

Mr. Chris Valdez: That was the revised attrition amount that I mentioned, applied across positions, reducing all office budgets proportionally. After that reduction across lines, the \$500,000 from Human Services was added in as well as the \$700,000 from the City Council amendment process. So the bottom line was reduced and then increased by those lines, resulting in the modest change.

If there is no further discussion, I will accept a motion to approve the Boston Public Health Commission's Fiscal Year 2026 budget.

A motion was made by Mr. Valdez, Seconded by Ms. Gutman, and approved unanimously by roll call vote.

Dr. Taveras: Thank you; the FY26 budget is approved.

Acceptance and Approval of Minutes from the March 12nd, 2025 Meeting

Dr. Taveras: Now I will accept a motion to approve the minutes of the March 12th Board of Health meeting.

A motion was made by Mr. Valdez, seconded by Ms. Guttman, and approved by a roll call vote of Ms. Gutman, Ms. Laptiste, Mr. Valdez, and Dr. Taveras. Mr. McLaren abstained as he was not a member of the Board at the previous meeting.

Now I will introduce Krystal Garcia and Tibrine da Fonseca to share an overview of the new 2025 Boston Community Health Needs Assessment report.

1. Boston Community Health Needs Assessment Overview

Ms. Garcia and Ms. da Fonseca present.

Dr. Taveras: On behalf of institutions on the triennial CHNA/CHIP cycle, we deeply appreciate this work. Are there any questions from the Board?

Ms. Gutman: Curious to hear more about immigration. Is there any more detail to share?

da Fonseca: In the report we go into migration. It was a key theme in focus groups, especially housing insecurity and its impact on immigrants. We saw similar findings with food insecurity. Latinx populations report higher food insecurity, we highlight suggestions and feedback from immigrant communities.

Ms. Gutman: It seems clear that that's an area we should be focused; I would like to see more and more attention.

Dr. Taveras: We've made a lot of progress on collaborative CHNA. How do we get closer to a collaborative Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP) with shared responsibility, and collaborative funding.

Ms. Garcia: It's an area of collective action that we have as our north star. We've been working collaboratively now in our third cycle. In the past it hasn't included specific dollar thresholds. However, we have begun to document what institutions are doing to support CHIP goals. There have been other steps that are in the right direction, and we look forward to more progress there.

Ms. da Fonseca: The CHIP has been an orienting point for where stakeholders want us focusing as a public health system. We've discussed examples of the hospital investment in the Mayor's Office of Housing acquisition program, the Atrius economic mobility investments, and working to link CHIP strategies with Live Long and Well life expectancy gap work.

Dr. Ojikutu: I echo that. The goal is that the CHIP be collaborative and we invest in a unified fashion. Put money where community wants it to go and where the needs identified. The Atrius \$10m investments will be tangible and clearly aligned with the CHIP goals and that's why the Collaborative was at the table throughout that initiative. We're all wanting to work more collaboratively, but it takes effort and will.

Also, with respect to immigrant populations. Mayor Wu has been outspoken on this issue and recently invested \$2.1m for immigrant serving organizations, some toward immigrant legal access, health, and youth development. We work closely with Mayor's Office of Immigrant Advancement to move initiatives forward. We always look to do more, especially given the anti-immigrant policies we are seeing.

Dr. Taveras: Can you say more about climate change? Are there opportunities to think about how to tackle that in a CHIP? Are there opportunities to learn what works from other jurisdictions?.

Ms. da Fonseca: We talked with a lot of other health departments across the country, and heard it organically come up with interviewees throughout our process. We heard intersections with economic insecurity and housing. For example, residents cited the issue of air conditioning costs on top of housing. We also see intersections with maternal health, child health, housing (and co-benefits to access to sustainable healthy housing).

Dr. Ojikutu: There is a climate cabinet in the City and they work across the city on initiatives, and a new activity is to engage on a Climate Council, which includes BPHC, so that there is

now more of a throughline to human health. The community sees it that way, we've long seen it that way. We've been able to elevate and lead on community resilience and preparedness. There's still more that we can do. Talking with others, it's not the norm elsewhere to have health at the table, so we are in a relatively better position than some others.

Taveras: Pleased to hear that that structure is in place.

Hearing no more questions, we will stand adjourned. Thank you all.

2. Adjourn