



BOARD MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, November 12th, 2025

2:30 p.m.

Board Members Present

Dr. Taveras, Ms. Gutman, Dr. Fish, 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 November 2025 meeting of the Boston Board of Health.

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.

Before I pass it on to Dr. Ojikutu, I want to welcome Dr. Guy Fish, who is our newest Board of Health member. Dr. Fish, thank you so much for joining us, for being part of this community, and for your leadership and bringing your leadership and expertise and engagement to, to the board. Welcome.

Dr. Fish: Thank you, Dr. Taveras. Thank you, everybody. I am pleased and delighted to be here, called into service for the people of the City of Boston. Thank you very much.

Dr. Taveras: I look forward to hearing from Dr. Ojikutu and the team about the work BPHC has been doing to respond on many fronts to protect the health and wellbeing of Boston residents. This afternoon, we will have a report from the Executive Office as well as a report from our auditors about our Fiscal Year 2025 financial audit, as well as a panel spotlighting BPHC's innovative wastewater surveillance program.

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

Executive Office Report

I want to start by welcoming Dr. Guy Fish to the Board of health. I have sincerely appreciated Dr. Guy Fish's partnership as a community health center leader, and I am excited to see him take on this new role on the Board of Health. His deep understanding of what it takes to deliver integrated care in the community and commitment to addressing health disparities in Boston will greatly benefit all residents.

Dr. Fish is one of the country's first MD/MBAs, and throughout his career has driven healthcare reform with an eye to equity. Dr. Fish's career spans international for-profit and nonprofit sectors from venture capital to ER and solo-clinical practice. He serves on the boards of Boston Medical Center, Capital Link, MLCHC, and the MA Health Policy Forum, and acts as an advisor to NACHC and the Eschelman Institute. His deep community ties are reflected in his current role as CEO for Codman Square Health Center, where he has focused on supporting underserved communities and connecting everyone with culturally congruent care.

His thought leadership has been instrumental as we've grappled with the closure of Carney Hospital and other pressing threats to health and health equity in Boston. Thank you for your willingness to serve, Dr. Fish.

BPHC remains committed to our work and continuing our day-to-day operations, including our federally funded programs -- despite the federal shutdown and problematic policy announcements. We will continue to provide our residents with the services they rely on, and we remain steadfast in our mission to offer evidence-based health guidance and services that help everyone in Boston live long and healthy lives. We are here to reaffirm our status as a trusted partner and source of accurate health information, services, and support.

As we have seen federal actions restrict access to gender-affirming care, we recognize that access to these health care services is critical to overall physical and mental health and wellness. Our Mayor's Health Line has information on hand for anyone needing information and referrals.

Continuing to engage in productive dialogue and information sharing with our peer state and local health departments as well as national organizations. To that end, we are participating in the Northeast Public Health Collaborative, a coalition of states and cities that are working together during this unprecedented time to share expertise, improve coordination, and protect the people we serve. We are proud to be part of this group of regional and local experts and leaders working together with the same goals, to guide our communities and rebuild public trust.

As the Board knows, one of our key strengths as a city and protective factor for the health of our residents is our near-universal (97%) health insurance coverage rate.

In addition to longer-term policy changes under the July reconciliation bill that will create significant barriers to MassHealth coverage, the expiration of Affordable Care Act tax credit subsidies is having an immediate impact on our residents' ability to afford coverage through the Massachusetts Health Connector.

The Boston Public Health Commission estimates that approximately 300,000 Boston residents are insured through private insurance, including employer-sponsored, private and subsidized plans through the Health Connector. While federal policy changes will likely result in premium increases across many income levels, the most drastic total cost increases will be seen by individuals and families that had received enhanced premium tax credits. Premium increases and the uncertainty around them threaten to result in financial strain, stress, and, ultimately, reduced coverage enrollment for low and moderate income and working families in Boston.

We are not sitting idly by. Instead, we are redoubling our efforts to mitigate these barriers and ensure access to coverage for as many residents as possible.

Open enrollment for individual coverage through the Health Connector starts Nov 1st and runs through January 23rd. For those who need help, the Mayor's Health Line is a free, confidential, health information and referral resource. We help all residents navigate applying for health insurance. The line is 617-534-5050 and is staffed Monday-Friday, 9:00 am to 5:00 pm

Medicare Open Enrollment is also open and runs from October 15, 2025 to December 7, 2025, and residents who are 65+ or have qualifying disabilities can sign up for coverage directly from the federal government-run marketplace at [medicare.gov](https://www.medicare.gov). For those who need assistance navigating Medicare, MHL and the City of Boston's Age Strong Commission has trained SHINE (Serving the Health Insurance Needs of Everyone) counselors who can help. The Age Strong Commission is hosting over 20 free in-person Medicare Open Enrollment clinics across Boston, and residents can call Age Strong at 617-635-4366 to make an appointment.

We have also been working to respond to the discontinuation of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits. More than 140,000 Boston residents (1 in 5 residents), or roughly 89,000 households, participated in SNAP in September 2025. Statewide, just over 30 percent of SNAP recipients are children, 28 percent are people with disabilities and 23 percent are people aged 60 years or older. The average monthly benefit is \$323 per household.

-Particularly as we enter the holiday season, this situation is heartbreaking and unacceptable.

Litigation in multiple federal courts, the response from the administration, the evolving negotiation over the shutdown of the federal government, and the administrative issues involved in issuing benefits have all added to the really heartbreaking uncertainty. From my understanding, Massachusetts is in a better position than many states to quickly disburse federal funds once received, as it did last Friday, and the City of Boston agencies have been prepared to inform residents with the latest information and resources. Yesterday, the Supreme Court extended its order blocking full SNAP payments. While the end of the government shutdown will result in the resumption of benefits, the delay and uncertainty has put families in untenable positions, exacerbating preexisting crisis levels of food insecurity.

Under Mayor Wu's leadership, the City of Boston has launched a citywide outreach effort to ensure impacted residents have every possible resource to afford food and necessities.

Recognizing the urgency to ensure residents are informed about food resources that are available, the City of Boston has trained its 311 call takers to triage food-related calls and launched Boston.gov/SNAP for a list of available resources for Boston residents facing food insecurity.

Food resources are still available include continued free meals served to all students in Boston Public Schools, as well as local, state and federal programs like WIC, the Healthy Incentives Program (HIP) and Double Up Food Bucks.

Residents can also find answers to frequently asked questions, including clarifying which state and federal programs are impacted by the federal government shutdown. The City's website ensures residents know where to go and how to access supports throughout this quickly evolving situation.

Additionally, the City of Boston will be launching direct outreach efforts to seniors, families with children, and other residents and small businesses with flyers about resources that are available. The City will also phone bank and door knock to meet residents where they are, as well as set up open house information sessions.

At the Boston Public Health Commission, we have always prioritized food access:

For decades we have maintained Shirley's Pantry in Mattapan which serves over 5,700 families each year, particularly at Thanksgiving. Our longest standing program, Health Baby Healthy Child, cares for over 1,000 women and children per year and provides access to healthy meals. We have been making arrangements to make sure Shirley's Pantry and Health Baby are able to provide additional support this year.

Each night, we provide shelter and 3 meals per day to 600 men and women – we don't turn anyone away - if you are hungry, you can stop by and get a meal.

I'm proud that as a city, as an organization, and broader Boston community we are also strengthening this programming to meet the immediate needs of residents. But ultimately, action at the federal level is needed to adequately fund SNAP benefits thousands of our neighbors rely on to get by.

As many of you know we are getting into the height of respiratory illness season, and it comes when the federal administration is causing confusion and chaos regarding vaccination and ACIP as well as intentionally delaying vaccines. Ensuring people have access to vaccination has been a priority to us at BPHC, and I want to thank all of the teams across the Commission who have been working very hard to make this a reality. We started holding vaccine clinics in September – they are free, insurance is not required, and available across the City to ensure easy access.

This year, we're also partnering with community-based organizations to make sure we're reaching people of color, immigrants, our most vulnerable, and those who may not be trusting of government. Most of these clinics are specifically to provide COVID-19 and flu vaccines as we approach respiratory virus season, but we have also provided routine childhood vaccinations at several of them.

Our vaccine clinics this fall have seen significantly more demand – many people express gratitude for these clinics because they do not know where else to go – information has become so confusing due to the federal government's misinformation, and access more limited, and so it is even more critical at this time that we are able to provide this service.

This year BPHC is piloting five community clinics that also include routine vaccinations. As of Friday 11/7 BPHC had completed 16 clinics (12 offering COVID/flu and 4 offering COVID, flu and routine vaccines), and has administered more than 2100 vaccines (2162) to over 1300 (1386) Boston residents. Of those vaccines administered 1010 were COVID and 1121 were flu. We have already far surpassed the total number of COVID and flu vaccines administered last season (1302 vaccines administered, 647 COVID vaccines and 655 flu vaccines). We are currently analyzing the data from these first 16 clinics to better understand clinic utilization and reach. This data will also be reviewed alongside COVID and Flu surveillance to inform decision-making about the need for additional clinics.

With confusing federal guidelines and misinformation running rampant online, BPHC is a crucial resource for residents looking to get the facts about vaccination and vaccine access. We are committed to ensuring our residents are receiving evidence-based vaccine information and that they can access life-saving vaccines.

We have and will continue to engage Boston residents about the importance of vaccination through our community engagement efforts, public awareness campaigns, and connection to

resources. Please continue to encourage people to come to our vaccine clinics; we're glad we can be this resource to our residents. You can find all our clinics at boston.gov/vaccine-clinics.

The State has been a critical partner in this work, and we appreciate the leadership they have taken to ensure access to vaccines. In September, DPH issued guidance reinforcing that vaccine access will remain protected, including COVID-19, flu, RSV, and childhood vaccines.

DPH now mandates that insurance carriers in Massachusetts cover all vaccines recommended by the state and collaborative, regardless of CDC recommendations.

For the first time, BPHC has been awarded a 2-year \$800,000 Public Health Excellence Grant, which will support our programs in meeting performance standards, expanding capacity, and deliver more coordinated and equitable local public health services, including added capacity to support cancer prevention work under our Live Long and Well population health equity agenda.

Our Environmental and Occupational Health division and Communications office Issued Cyanobacteria Bloom Advisories related to the bloom in the Charles River, helping the public understand health risks associated with these events and their status.

We have also been running the 2025 Boston Parks Fall Fitness Series, sponsored by Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts. The series will offer free weekly classes in City of Boston parks from October 5 through November 15, 2025.

Throughout the fall, the Fall Fitness series, giving residents free access to a variety of healthy activities, including Walking Group, Barre Fusion, HIIT, Kick-It, Tai Chi, ZUMBA® Gold, and more. Classes are designed for all skill levels and ages, with options that are family-friendly, age-friendly, and welcoming to those who may be new to fitness.

Resources like these free classes help reduce the risk of chronic disease, helping to advance our Live Long and Well citywide population health equity agenda by activating our public parks and creating barrier-free fitness opportunities.

I want to congratulate our Center for Behavioral Health and Wellness and Northeastern's Institute for Health Equity and Social Justice resource for hosting Putting the Pieces Together: Advocacy, Action & Policy for the Social Determinants of Mental Health on October 21st. We were joined by MassLeague President Michael Curry, Chief of Housing Sheila Dillon, and Chief of Economic Opportunity and Inclusion Segun Idowu. The day really helped to focus on the concrete connections between living conditions and mental wellbeing, in a concrete solutions-focused way.

Since our last meeting, we're continuing our work to support the city's goal of ending congregate outdoor substance use while reducing overdose mortality and ensuring that

individuals who are living with substance use disorder are housed and have access to treatment. We have been facilitating a weekly roundtable where providers come together, really do intensive case management and coordination. We bring issues to the table so to determine how to coordinate as a city better, in ways that I don't think had really happened previously. I think this has been a successful initiative. It's been well received, in less than 2 months, 15 individuals have been provided care, planning and coordination through the group, and are moving forward, to get access, better access to services.

As you know, we also manage two of the largest individual homeless shelters in the region, partnering with the Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities, the Mayor's Office of Housing, and other providers to ensure there is enough space for everyone. Our Homeless Services team is working to prepare for increased shelter demand in winter months, and are already seeing relatively high census numbers in our Woods Mullen women's shelter.

On October 10th, we celebrated the graduation of 32 new EMTs and the promotion of seven EMS members in a ceremony held at Faneuil Hall. The graduates, all state-certified EMTs, successfully completed the Boston EMS Recruit Academy, an intensive training program that prepares recruits to deliver high-quality emergency care across the city. We also celebrated key promotions, including two Promoted to Superintendents: Thomas Finn (Field Operations) and William Lessard (Professional Standards). We also promoted five Deputy Superintendents, Sean Alexander: Field Operations, Sharon Efstathiou: Shift Commander, Paul Giannetti: Shift Commander, Taishana Lewis: Community Initiatives & Services, and Elizabeth Rimas: Training & Quality Improvement

I am pleased to celebrate Elsie Morantus Petion who serves as the Head Nurse Supervisor for receiving a Shattuck Award for exemplary public service from the Boston Municipal research Bureau. Elsie has worked for BPHC since 1988, for many years as a Public Health Nurse Home Visitor, and since 2021, as Head Nurse Supervisor for our Healthy Baby Healthy Child program. Please join me in congratulating Elsie on this fitting honor.

I want to thank our Administration and Finance team for once again stewarding our annual fiscal audit process and welcome our audit team from Clifton Larson Allen to share their findings with the Board.

I'm also excited for the Board to hear from our Center for Public Health Science and Innovation about BPHC's wastewater monitoring project. This innovative work has been well received in national convenings, and advances strategies in our Strategic Plan's Data and Innovation priority area.

Dr. Taveras: Thank you for that report and BPHC's work and your incredible leadership in the face of a lot of headwinds. You and the teams that you're leading are making us proud to live in Boston, congratulations to the awardees, promotes, and the social determinants of mental health conference; I've heard a lot of great feedback. Do we have any questions from the Board?

Valdez: With respect to substance use disorder, new guidelines related to harm reduction activities and what is not allowed: is the commission going to have to make any changes with respect to things like needle exchanges for example?

Dr. Ojikutu: Funding for the syringe service as part of our harm reduction, is coming from the state rather than federal sources. I want to be clear that we strongly support harm reduction, especially as an infectious disease doctor, but I also see it as an important way to build relationships with the people we serve.

Ms. Gutman: I work with SEIU1199, and represent 10,000 home care workers in Boston, many of which face food insecurity and face threats with health insurance coverage. Are there food vouchers that are being distributed? I wonder about the possibility for partnering with unions.

Dr. Ojikutu: The partnership includes The Boston Foundation, as well as ABCD, and Immigrant Family Services Institute with a goal of reaching as many residents who were impacted as possible. When this arose, we raised more than \$1m initially. As the changes happened, we moved forward. Funding was pushed out to orgs, disseminating gifts cards. Residents should call 311 for a list of access points. We also put additional resource into our Shirley's Pantry and also enhanced resources for Healthy Baby, Healthy Child as well as our shelters. I can find out more about partnerships with unions.

Dr. Taveras: Can we come back to pharmacy access at a future meeting, especially as it relates to access to vaccination?

Dr. Fish: I think the pharmacy situation is worth investigation. I am also interested in learning more about the overdose data to action grants and public health vending machines. Are there thoughts of replicating?

Dr. Ojikutu: We think there is room for expanding this model. Michele Clark follow up with you to provide more information.

Dr. Taveras: Hearing no/no additional questions...

Acceptance and Approval of Minutes from the September 10, 2025 Meeting

Dr. Taveras: If there is no further discussion, I will accept a motion to approve and accept the minutes from the September 10th, 2025 Board of Health meeting.

A motion was made by Mr. Valdez, Seconded by Mr. McLaren, and approved by roll call by members present at the September meeting (Dr. Taveras, Ms. Laptiste, Mr. McLaren, and Mr. Valdez).

Dr. Taveras: Now I will take a vote by roll call: Ms. Laptiste, Mr. McLaren, Mr. Valdez, and myself, Dr. Taveras.

Dr. Taveras: Thank you; the minutes are approved.

Spotlight: Wastewater Monitoring Program

Dr. Taveras: I am pleased to introduce Dr. Sanouri Ursprung, director of BPHC's, Center for Public Health Science and Innovation to lead a presentation about some exciting work that BPHC has been leading to use neighborhood-level wastewater sampling to deliver a better picture of infectious disease risk in Boston's communities. Dr. Ursprung, please go ahead.

Panelists present, including Dr. Sanouri Ursprung, Dr. Shoba Nair, Director Epidemiology & Evaluation, and Justin Hart, Wastewater Program Manager.

Dr. Taveras: Thank you for sharing this innovative work. It's not surprising that this has been such popular info, to have this information at this level is fantastic. How do you tie it to navigating people to resources?

Mr. Hart: We are attempting to answer how bad and which direction. There is guidance on the page tied to the different levels, as well as vaccination clinics, DPH info.

Dr. Ursprung: We also have an elaborate communication protocols, advisories through BPHC's Office of Public Preparedness Medical Intelligence Center, notifications to specific sectors.

Dr. Taveras: To have a community-based early warning system is incredibly innovative.

Mr. Valdez: Mentioned Harris County and Laredo. How was that connection made, and do you anticipate others?

Mr. Hart: This was facilitated by NACCHO, will continue to serve in that capacity, also take questions in less formal capacities as well.

Are there any questions from the Board?

Fiscal Year 2025 Audit Report

Dr. Taveras: Now, I am pleased to introduce Jennifer Cook from our audit firm CliftonLarsonAllen for a report on the FY25 financial audit.

Ms. Cook presents, on the agenda items listed in the presentation, including the audit scope, the expected opinions, and required communications to governance, timeline to issuance, financial statement highlights, and upcoming Governmental Accounting Standards Board, noting that CLA is awaiting reports from OMB to finalize. Audit did not identify any material weaknesses that are expected to be communicated. Anticipate issuance by December 5th. The audit of federal awards is completed on a later timeline. We did not have any difficulties or disagreements with management. Noted increase in assets. Commission was able to collect more than expected post-data breach. Decrease in pension liability.

Dr. Fish: It is traditional for a Board to ask: were there any difficulties working with management?

Ms. Cook: No, there was not.

Mr. Valdez: I understand this is an audit of the Commission, and this audit will be standalone, or is it really a standalone audit? How does this get rolled into the City of Boston's audit? Are they treated separately?

Cook: We are considered a discretely presented component.

Dr. Taveras: Thank you for your work on this and the comprehensive presentation. Are there any questions from the Board.

Dr. Taveras: Hearing no/no additional questions, Mr. McCann, please confirm that a vote is not needed at this time.

Mr. McCann: That is correct.

Dr. Taveras: Thank you Ms. Cook for the comprehensive presentation of the audit.

Adjourn

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

Attest: /s/ PJ McCann, Board Secretary