

HEAL Council Meeting Summary

DATE: FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 17, 2021

LOCATION: ZOOM MEETING

September 2021 HEAL Meeting

Welcome (Roll Call)

HEAL Council Members: Aaron Wittnebel, Ayah Mohammed, Cassandra Silveira, Jennifer Nguyễn Moore, Dr. Jokho Farah, Dr. Laurelle Myhra, Pa Chua Vang, Talia Miracle, Therese Genis, Dr. Tracine Asberry, Zitlali Chavez Ayala

MDH Staff: Amy Lopez (CHE Health Equity Planner), Catherine Dittberner Lloyd (Health Regulation), Chelsie Huntley (Community Health Division Director), Jeannette Raymond (Public Health Practice, Community Engagement Supervisor), Mary Manning (Health Improvement Bureau Assistant Commissioner), Meredith Cooney (CDC PHAP, CHE Tribal Health Fellow), Sara Chute (Center for Health Equity, Acting Director), Lisa Thimjon (Legislative Liaison)

Community Members: Hadija Steen Mills (Healthcare Reparations Cooperative)

Dr. Jokho Farah communicated to the HEAL council that the agenda for September's meeting was to pause and do a pulse check on how the HEAL meetings were going. The bulk of our meeting would be spent reconnecting, hearing from HEAL members/staff, and collecting feedback.

Announcing the Center for Health Equity (CHE) Director

Chelsie Huntley, Community Health Division Director

Chelsie Huntley shared that Dr. Halkeno Tura was selected as the new Center for Health Equity Director. He will be joining MDH on October 11th. In his last role, Dr. Tura was the Deputy Director of Black Hawk County Public Health in Iowa. He has experience managing public health programs and advancing health equity in the U.S. and abroad. Dr. Tura holds a Ph.D. in Community and Behavioral Health, a Master of Art (MA) Degree in Public Health Education and a Master of Public Health (MPH) in Nutrition. He is also a Certified Health Education Specialist (CHES).

Amy will send Dr. Tura's bio to HEAL members. A formal announcement will be shared with partners once Dr. Tura begins the position.

Legislative Update

Lisa Thimjon, Legislative Liaison

Dr. Jokho Farah shared that since HEAL's inception, MDH and the council have been working together to make HEAL a council that is recognized formally in statute by the legislature. Currently, HEAL's existence relates to an Eliminating Health Disparities Initiative (EHDI) Statute. Lisa Thimjon, MDH's Legislative Liaison, attended the last in-person HEAL meeting in 2020 to

discuss creating legislation language for HEAL. In 2020 and 2021, there was a hold on policy bills due to COVID. She presented the following draft of the legislative language to HEAL.

- <http://wdoc.house.leg.state.mn.us/leg/LS91/HF3928.1.pdf>. Specific language starts on page 4, line 25.

Lisa is seeking feedback and HEAL's approval on the language. Once approved, she will slate it for the upcoming legislative session. In addition, Lisa will work with the MDH team and others to queue those to testify as needed. Please send Lisa feedback on the legislative language by September 30th.

HEAL Business

Team Building-Wellness Check

HEAL Co-Chairs; HEAL Members

Jennifer Nguyễn Moore shared that the co-chairs wanted to leave space, during the September meeting, to pause for a wellness check. Previous meetings have been busy. Prompts and questions were sent via the agenda to discuss.

Below are the questions:

What are you working on now? How is your work impacted because of COVID?

What are community members struggling with outside of access to COVID tests/vaccines (e.g., health check-ups)?

What do you need to be successful in your work and navigating through self-care in the age of COVID community response?

What inspires you and makes you feel whole?

Themes/Comments shared

- Many issues have not been addressed like basic needs, employment, housing, lack of access to food sources, transportation, and police response to BIPOC. Some of these issues have been dealt with via a "band-aid" approach to support communities. COVID has exacerbated all these issues.
- Many participants were mothers /parents too. As a result of COVID, one mom commented she declined participating in additional community work and to embrace self-care in her life. The group agreed and shared resources for self-care with each other. Self-care connects to mental health, wellness, and individuals need to be transparent about it to start talking about solutions.
- Mental health was a concern. One member shared that specifically in the Hmong community, mental health and admitting someone has a mental health issue is still considered a taboo and stigmatized.
- Questions emerged from the discussion, such as: Individuals from communities with food and housing shortages and lack of financial resources, how does one adjust mental health to

HEAL COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES

- those challenges and still offer/ask for resources? How do communities share the frustration and positivity from those situations to help each other?
- The group discussed available resources like no-cost counseling and how to access these resources.
 - An MDH staff mentioned how inspirational the generosity of communities during the pandemic and community work has been. It has inspired people to continue their work. Additionally, she noted how inspiring youth can be during this time.
 - One member added that while COVID work has been inspirational and it has been nice to see communities come together; it has been exhausting. This work takes a toll on your mental health that are working directly on COVID response. It is important to prioritize time for your self-care, know one's workload, and to say "no" to certain things.
 - Another theme was on self-care, what brings each person joy, and what motivates colleagues to do this work. There were some mothers in the group that shared about what things motivated them, including instilling social and racial justice into their child's heart.
 - Certain areas that were amplified by COVID included: how to focus on education and the attempts to work on achievement gaps in learning in a strategic and positive way; how to implement grants with long-term solutions that could fill achievement gaps caused by inequities; how to address food insecurity, food deserts, the rising cost of food, and hunger and how these issues stem from existing structural racism; how rural areas had limited access to services and resources like home health, check-ins, and specialty providers; how to engage the local public health departments to provide and increase access to meet the needs of communities that are experiencing or being impacted by COVID.
 - MDH staff (who perceived themselves to have privilege) were asked "how they use(d) their privilege to move health equity forward in their work and across the agency?" HEAL is mindful that not everyone has the same level of privilege.
 - One staff person feels like she has privilege working for state government, the Center of Health Equity, and MDH. Her privilege is having a voice. While people believe that she has expertise in equity, instead she has knowledge, passion, and experience. In the COVID response, she felt that privilege when she pushed hard for equity in the Incident Command Structure. It was frustrating and took a toll on her mental health because she did not feel heard. MDH staff had to intensely advocate for equity in access to testing and the emergency response structure. Thankful for the Cultural, Faith, and Disabilities branch who are continuing this work. She questions how much power she has since she is not in a leadership position within CHE or MDH. She also questions how much she can do to make incremental change within governmental systems.
 - One MDH leader spoke of raising voices of staff and influencing hiring at important tables. She continues asking hard questions and working differently. Additionally, she works to support staff who are exhausted.
 - Another MDH leader stated that she has taken this responsibility to heart her entire life. The elders in her community gave her that responsibility to represent her community when she started school in a predominantly white community. She has always felt like she has responsibility to lift up the communities in her work daily. The worked has changed over the years. In some ways, it is easier because she is not the only one pushing back and it is not

only her trying to represent communities. The community and the population are pushing back based on how we treat people. This is part of her responsibility and part of her being.

- Another staff noted has always been concerned about public policies. She has questioned how policies serve populations and operate along with how to evaluate trends without community representatives. She worked to advance health equity in the Health Equity Report in 2014. She wants to evaluate and review health disparities for healthcare practitioners and healthcare professionals as the lack of diversity contributes to disparities. She's curious about "How to move the work forward?" With her evaluation and research experience along with her expertise in policies, her contribution will be continued through partnerships to build outreach, engagement, and tools for how regulators embed health equity across the agency. In reviewing data available, she will look how to improve outreach for Minnesotans. She will do what she can to use her voice and words. She will be self-reflective and forgiving as it is important to her as a person to help lead and change.
- Another staff mentioned she is passionate about health equity and moving that forward. To her, it is centralized in this work. She will always talk about it, bring it up, spotlight it in conversations. As a young professional, she wants to continue highlighting and elevating these things when she is involved in conversations.

Updates & Announcements

MDH Updates/Announcements

Jennifer Nguyễn Moore thanked people for coming. She hoped people felt the conversation was needed/helpful to understand everyone's work and know we are all human along with reconnecting in age of talking to a screen. HEAL Co-Chairs confirmed the importance of self-care in this work.

HEAL Council Member Updates/Announcements

None

Public Comment

None

Action items/Questions to be raised at next meeting

None

MEETING ADJOURNED AT 2:00PM

Next Meeting

Date: October 22, 2021, Time: 12:00pm – 2:00pm, Location: Zoom meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89424858824?pwd=NvhSangyNGc1Nkk0a242VmUzOU1Zdz09>