**Meeting Summary for Dukes County Health Council Meeting**

Dec 19, 2024

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Meet

The group discussed the progress of their work, with a focus on Leah Hamner's presentation on Alpha-gal syndrome and respiratory diseases, and the development of a survey aimed at characterizing public health programming. They also discussed the importance of vaccination, the need for a permanent shelter space for the homeless population on Martha's Vineyard, and the focus on tick-borne illnesses and maternal health. The conversation ended with a discussion on planning for the next year, with a shift towards advocacy and the idea of having a column in the newspaper.

Next steps

Health Council members encouraged to alert Lisa Belcastro of Harbor Homes about potential shelter locations, to support Harbor Homes in its efforts to find a permanent shelter site and to combat misinformation about homelessness.

Christine Todd to write a letter to the editor about homelessness on Martha's Vineyard.

Health Council members to come prepared with ideas for goals and objectives for 2025 at the January meeting.

Health Council to consider ways to be a stronger advocacy group and have more impact in the community.

Lisa Nagy volunteered to work with Dan Pesch and Claire Seguin on presenting information about potential environmental causes for long COVID, POTS, and related health issues to the health providers at the hospital.

Leah Hamner to analyze and present findings from the Alpha-gal syndrome survey to the Health Council and local boards of health when the survey is completed.

**Dukes County Health Council**

**Meeting Minutes**

**December 19, 2024**

* **Call to Order Kathleen Samways**
* **Review and Approval of Minutes Kathleen Samways**
* **Alpha Gal Survey and Infectious Disease Update-Lea Hamner**

Alpha-Gal Syndrome and Tick Prevalence

Lea Hamner, an epidemiologist for Dukes County, Barnstable County, and Nantucket, presented an update on tick distribution on the Vineyard, tick related illness , Alpha-gal syndrome and respiratory diseases. She discussed the prevalence of ticks, particularly the Lone Star tick, and its potential link to Alpha-gal syndrome, a red meat allergy. Lea highlighted the challenges of diagnosing and managing the allergy due to its inconsistent reactions and delayed onset. She also mentioned the ongoing efforts to increase awareness, support those affected, and investigate the syndrome further. Lea emphasized the importance of tick bite prevention and the need for more research on the risk factors and protective factors associated with Alpha-gal syndrome. She also discussed the potential for studying hunters as a definable population to gain more insights into the syndrome.

Survey for Alpha Gal syndrome and tick exposure

Lea reported on a survey focused on tick exposure and alpha gal syndrome that is currently underway in the community. She emphasized the importance of participation, particularly from hunters, and shared that the survey would be used for both more comprehensive future study design and public health programming. Lea noted that the survey was a between her office the University of North Carolina and CDC. Lea plans to analyze the findings and present them to the local boards of health. Bob Laskowski asked about the number of survey participants needed and the progress made so far, to which Lea responded that she had 30 hunter responses and 350 non-hunter responses, and was aiming for 50 hunter responses. Bob also inquired about the involvement of the hunting club on the venture, to which Lea confirmed that both the Rod and Gun Club and the Martha's Vineyard Hunt Club were supporting the survey.

Importance of Vaccination

In the meeting, Kathleen and Lea discussed the importance of vaccination, particularly against pertussis, to protect infants and vulnerable populations. Lea highlighted the increasing cases of pertussis in the region and the need for preventive measures. Kathleen suggested the possibility of creating informational flyers for senior centers to raise awareness about the booster shot. Lea recommended reaching out to Dave Karen for further information on the MV Vaccine Initiative.

* **Harbor Homes/Winter Homeless Shelter updates** –Lisa Belcastro,

Lisa Belcastro, the director of the overnight winter shelter program on Martha's Vineyard, discussed the increasing need for shelter services and the challenges faced by the organization. She highlighted a 212% increase in guests served last year and the urgent need for a permanent shelter building. Lisa also emphasized the importance of safe camping areas and the need for the community to come together to address homelessness. She mentioned that the current shelter space will be open on Christmas and Thanksgiving, and that they have approval from the school committee to keep the shelter open if the daytime high is below 28 degrees. Christine Todd expressed her appreciation for Lisa's work and the need for the community to take on the issue of homelessness. Lisa suggested a meeting to plan ahead for April and to discuss potential safe camping areas in each town.

Lisa Belcastro discussed the need for a permanent shelter space for the increasing number of homeless people on Martha's Vineyard.. Christine Todd emphasized the need for public awareness and vocal support for the issue, and suggested creative solutions to find a place for everyone.

Lisa shared her experiences with potential locations and the challenges faced in finding a suitable site. She encouraged the Health Council to promote the shelter and break the stigma surrounding homelessness. She also stressed the need for financial support and advocacy. Christine Todd agreed to write a letter to the editor about the issue.

* **Public Health Update Sarah Toste**

Sarah Toste discussed the Departments of Public Health’s focus on tick-borne illnesses. She also mentioned the Inter Island Public Health Excellence Collaborative's work on maternal health and the goal of hiring another individual to strengthen relationships with the Portuguese-speaking community.

* **Future Agenda-Health Council Priority Setting for 2025**

Kathleen Samways introduced the idea of planning for the next year. She noted that the Health Council plays a major role as an advocate on health related issues. The setting of annual priorities helps focus the Health Council’s activities and enhances the Council’s effectiveness.

Lisa Nagy expressed her desire for the Health Council to address issues the relationship to environmental triggers and diseases like alcoholism and long-Covid.

Kathleen Samways ended the conversation by thanking everyone for their contributions and wishing them a happy holiday season.

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