ANNUAL REPORT 2020

BOSTON PUBLIC HEALTH COMMISSION

1010 Massachusetts Avenue, Boston, MA 02118
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Dear Readers,

I'm pleased to present the 2020 Annual Report of the Boston Public Health Commission (BPHC). This report provides a summary of our work to carry out our mission to protect, preserve, and promote the health and well-being of all Boston residents, particularly the most vulnerable.

The BPHC's work looked different due to the COVID-19 pandemic. COVID-19 necessitated our staff collaborate across public health service centers and bureaus. It was my pleasure to witness the 1,100 dedicated staff of the BPHC rise to meet the new challenges and the uncertainty of this time to support the health and well-being of Bostonians.

Come June, increased movement and organizing for racial equity inspired the BPHC and the City to deepen our own commitment to racial health equity for all of our residents and staff. Dubbed the "twin pandemics," COVID-19 and racial injustice defined our work in 2020.

This report reflects our teamwork in tackling the twin pandemics and in maintaining our services. Rather than being organized by Bureau or Public Health Service Center as in previous years, this report uplifts our collaborative efforts.

As vaccine efforts increase and levels of COVID-19 positivity lower, we are excited to create policies to address the social determinants of health that made the pandemic a disproportionate burden to some of our residents and neighborhoods so we may have a thriving, healthy Boston free of racism.

Rita Nieves, RN, MPH, LICSW
Interim Executive Director
The Boston Public Health Commission, one of the country's oldest health departments, is an independent public agency providing a wide range of health services and programs. The BPHC became nationally accredited in 2017 by the Public Health Accreditation Board. It is governed by a seven-member board of health appointed by the Mayor of Boston.

Public service and access to quality health care are the cornerstones of our mission - to protect, preserve, and promote the health and well-being of all Boston residents, particularly those who are most vulnerable.

We envision a thriving Boston where all residents live healthy, fulfilling lives free of racism, poverty, violence, and other systems of oppression.

The Commission's more than 40 programs are grouped into six bureaus:

- Child, Adolescent & Family Health
- Community Health Initiatives
- Emergency Medical Services
- Homeless Services
- Infectious Disease
- Recovery Services

There are nine public health service centers:

- Accreditation and Quality Improvement
- Administration & Finance
- Communications
- Consortium for Professional Development
- General Counsel
- Intergovernmental Relations
- Office of Public Health Preparedness
- Office of Racial Equity and Community Engagement
- Research and Evaluation Office
On March 15, 2020 the BPHC and the Mayor of Boston declared a Public Health Emergency in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The BPHC began a full response that has continued since Boston’s first case on February 1, 2020. This included response operations run by Public Health Preparedness, rapidly scaled up contact tracing by Infectious Disease’s Communicable Disease Control, and preparations for EMTS and paramedics from Boston Emergency Medical Services to respond to medical emergencies in a time of uncertainty and risk.

**POWER OF PREPAREDNESS**

The Office of Public Health Preparedness partially activated our Medical Intelligence Center (MIC) in December 2019, and transitioned to a full activation on March 13, 2020 for a new record of 342 days for activation. The MIC managed BPHC’s emergency operations as well as served as a conduit for resource and information sharing for response partners throughout the City.

**FRONT LINE RESPONSE - BOSTON EMS**

Boston Emergency Medical Services has been on the front lines of the COVID-19 pandemic, screening 9-1-1 calls and safely treating patients with proficiency and professionalism. In the Spring, EMS piloted a telehealth program.

- Treated 3,712 COVID-19 positive patients
- Screened 21,577 medical calls as suspected for COVID-19
- 115,537 clinical incidents
- 143,189 ambulance responses
- 75,800 patient transports
- 18,079 personal protective kits issued to personnel
- 323 referrals to shelter
PUBLIC HEALTH 101 - CONTACT TRACING

Contact tracing is one of the oldest tools we have in public health. Our team of public health nurses rapidly scaled up our capacity to conduct one of the most extensive contact tracing efforts in Boston’s history. Our public health nurses provided follow-up and support to not only individual residents, but also to support organizations like Boston’s long-term care facilities, area colleges and universities, and early childhood education providers.

DATA-DRIVEN POLICY

The Research and Evaluation Office (REO) provided the support necessary to create data-driven policies.

Data-driven public health policy optimizes resource allocation and improves efficacy of public health communications. REO answered 146 data requests and questions.

PUBLIC INFORMATION

Communication and education to the public was a vital part of COVID-19 Response.

Communications collaborated closely with the Infectious Disease Bureau, the Research and Evaluation Office, and other Commission departments to help disseminate information to the public in an accessible format.
COVID-19 COMMUNITY SUPPORTS

COMFORT STATIONS

Recovery Services, City departments and community partners temporarily opened small “Comfort Stations” with hand washing facilities and portable bathrooms for unsheltered people with limited options due to COVID-19.

They also supported provision of harm reduction services, screening for COVID-19, daily overdose reversals, wound care and connection to services.

ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH CONTROL PLANS

The Community Initiatives Bureau has been closely involved in reviewing COVID-19 control plans for reopening a variety of sites. Examples include:

- Learning pods set up by community organizations to support BPS remote learning students
- Elderly housing apartments
- City programs such as SOAR, the Parking Clerk’s Office, and Entre Familia, etc.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

In order to support communities with high positivity rates throughout the summer and fall, Infectious Disease and Community Initiatives conducted several weeks of community outreach.

- Distributed 1,922 COVID kits to residents at parks and food distribution sites
- Visited 829 businesses and distributed 805 COVID kits

RECOVERY SERVICES AND ACCESS, HARM REDUCTION, OVERDOSE PREVENTION AND EDUCATION (AHOPE)

- Placed 3,944 clients SUD treatment programs
- Served 5,058 unique participants (AHOPE)
- Reported 1,416 reversals (AHOPE)
In June 2020, the protests and vigils across the country honored the life of George Floyd and other Black Americans and people of color that died from police violence. At the same time, the COVID-19 pandemic disproportionately impacted Black Americans.

On June 12, the Mayor of Boston declared racism as a public health crisis and released funds to the Boston Public Health Commission for work related to eight strategies to reduce racial health disparities in the City.

**Request for Information: Racism-Free Boston**

The Office of Racial Equity and Community Engagement released an RFI to ask residents and community organizations on their vision of a Boston without racism, poverty, and other systems of oppression. 197 Residents and 23 organizations offered policy suggestions in the areas: City Policy & Practice, Healthcare Access, Data, and Advocacy. Residents also wrote about sadness due to racism and policing. Residents said we should prioritize:

#1 Housing  #2 Education  #3 Jobs  #4 Mental Health

**Maternal Health Equity Commission**

The Child, Adolescent, and Family Health (CAFH) Bureau and Intergovernmental Relations were instrumental to the signing of "An Act to reduce racial disparities in maternal health" into law through virtual advocacy.

This act established a new commission to reduce racial inequities in maternal mortality and severe maternal morbidity. Special thanks to the Community Action Network and the Maternal Equity Coalition for their partnership.
THE MOVEMENT FOR RACIAL EQUITY

COVID-19 VACCINE FOCUS GROUPS

In December, the Office of Racial Equity and Community Engagement hosted 10 focus groups with 97 participants to understand residents’ thoughts and concerns regarding the newly authorized COVID-19 vaccines.

Those interested in taking the vaccine expressed they wanted to protect themselves, their families and elders, their communities, and to return to a sense of normal.

EQUITABLE PROCUREMENT

Administration and Finance led the equitable procurement initiative, which sought to increase BPHC contracts with Certified Underrepresented Business Enterprises (CUBEs). COVID-19 resulted in hundreds of contracts and purchase orders.

The majority of PPE have been purchased from a disabled, veteran owned business, and both our reusable masks and cleaning services for our vaccination clinics have been purchased from separate Boston-based minority, women owned businesses. Nearly all COVID-related food purchases have been from small, local Boston businesses.
Administration & Finance strategized to create supports for teleworking employees and employees required to report to their sites. **2/3 of employees continued to report to a BPHC workplace during the pandemic.**

Human Resources and Labor and Employment worked to implement new temporary policies, including policies regarding COVID-19 related sick leave benefits and leaves of absence, reasonable accommodations, COVID-19 testing, emergency reassignments and more.

Operations supported the distribution of needed safety supplies for staff for workstation setup including plexiglass barriers and COVID-19 symptom self-monitoring checklists.

To support telecommuting staff, the team hosted trainings on Microsoft Teams, Outlook 365, and “Going Paperless.”

Information and Technology Services accommodated the **29% increase in “Helpdesk” requests** and **deployed 200 laptops** to telecommuting staff.

**CONSORTIUM FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

- **659 professional development events** for staff
- Placed **46 student interns** from 18 schools in our programs
- Onboarded **138 new employees** with New Hire Orientation
Homeless Services Bureau leadership led the City’s response to ensuring that individuals experiencing homelessness were safe during the pandemic by coordinating amongst all area providers and hospitals, opening isolation and quarantining facilities, creating citywide transportation, alert, and communication tools, and facilitating ongoing testing.

By midway through the year, most shelters had lower positivity rates than the rest of the city and the state. **4,179 unique individuals were provided housing services** and workforce development.

**TRAININGS TO PREVENT EVICTIONS**

Community Health Education Center (CHEC) developed a series of online, multilingual sessions to prepare community health workers to help preserve the tenancy of at-risk residents.

**232 CHWs received technical training** in supporting clients to respond effectively to landlord petitions for eviction via the Massachusetts Defense for Eviction (MADE) system. CHEC is thankful for this partnership with Homestart, Boston Legal Services, the City of Boston’s Office of Housing Stability.

**HOUSING AND SUPPORT SERVICES FOR PLWH**

Ryan White Service Division facilitated several collaborations with Boston Eligible Metropolitan Area agencies to address service gaps for people living with HIV (PLWH) who were facing imminent eviction at the end of the Massachusetts Eviction Moratorium.

This partnership also worked to increase access to meal programs and to linguistic and interpreter services to facilitate provider communication.
One Boston resident was experiencing tremendous tooth pain. His usual dentist completely closed their office due to COVID-19; however, Ryan White Dental Program staff worked to get the client an initial virtual appointment through tele-dentistry. After assessment, the client was seen in the office to remedy his pain. This client was grateful. RWDP staff provided dental services for 2,424 HIV positive individuals. RWDP is thankful to have a network of providers to rely upon in this difficult time.

Mayor’s Health Line

Received 18,712 calls

Connected 890 people to health insurance

Trained 60 residents in HelpSteps (Mass 211)

Finding Home in Boston

Andreas fled his home in Gabon, Africa where personal experiences with violence led to severe PTSD. He came to Boston seeking medical care but soon became homeless. The SAMHSA team was able to find him housing, and connect him to free and confidential mental health resources for undocumented individuals. He is now in stable housing, engaging with mental health providers, and utilizing his two favorite coping skills: art and cooking.

Homeless Services Bureau ended homelessness for 322 individuals by securing permanent housing.
This program provides young people experiential learning opportunities with a focus on health equity. Over five programs across two divisions in the CAFH bureau teach 200 young people about healthy relationships, health careers, community organizing, dropout and violence prevention, health education, and self-care activities virtually. The Summer Enrichment Program is thankful for its partners including Boston Medical Center, Boston University, and Simmons College.

In 2020 the campaign shifted to a virtual format and social media push which showed over 6200 visits to the landing page, 6.6mm impressions, 51.8k clicks. Campaign materials are available in six languages.

**COPECODE CLUB**

A unique youth prevention campaign, CopeCode Club, was developed with a trauma- and youth-informed lens and racial equity framework. Its purpose was to address youth substance use by focusing on the underlying factors that can lead youth to substance use (difficult feelings, lack of coping skills).

**YOUTH SUMMER ENRICHMENT PROGRAM**

This program provides young people experiential learning opportunities with a focus on health equity. Over five programs across two divisions in the CAFH bureau teach 200 young people about healthy relationships, health careers, community organizing, dropout and violence prevention, health education, and self-care activities virtually. The Summer Enrichment Program is thankful for its partners including Boston Medical Center, Boston University, and Simmons College.

**COMMUNITY ACTION ON LEAD**

With National Association of County & City Health Officials' (NACCHO) grant support, the Environmental & Occupational Health Division’s Lead Poisoning Prevention Program completed the Community Action on Lead Project using a Health in All Policies approach.

They reviewed existing policies and resources to identify areas for improvements and future policy development. They hosted 4 public meetings, with the average 20+ participants including those with professional and personal experiences with lead and lead poisoning.

They also surveyed 26 property owners who had made their homes lead-safe, parents of children with lead poisoning, and contractors who work with lead hazards.
The Education and Community Engagement Division awarded $1,450,000 in Community-Based Prevention Funding to 11 community agencies to educate and prevent HIV, HCV and STI infections for highest risk Boston residents.

All agencies share the goals of the Division: to reduce the rates of infection for the diseases of concern and support the overall continued health and wellness of those most vulnerable.

These agencies also:
- Made 1,718 Counseling/Testing/Screening referrals and confirmed 1,594
- Made 153 detox/substance use treatment referrals and confirmed 149
- Made 204 health/primary medical care referrals and confirmed 111
- Made 101 mental health referrals and confirmed 24
- Distributed 10,693 Bleach kits, 80,448 condoms, 1,924 internal condoms, 7,683 educational brochures, 4,929 safer sex kits.

**QUALITY IMPROVEMENT IN RECOVERY PLANNING**

The Accreditation and Quality Improvement (AQI) Office supported the MIC and the Executive Office early in the pandemic in response and recovery projects. AQI has also provided guidance on project management and QI tools to staff in key roles in response and recovery. Results included the use of charters in recovery planning workgroups.

- 9 staff completed the Quality Improvement toolbox series
- 3 Quality Improvement projects were completed
- 98% Trainee Satisfaction
HENRY L. SHATTUCK
PUBLIC SERVICE AWARD

Stacey Kokaram, Director of the Office of Public Health Preparedness was awarded the Henry L. Shattuck Public Service Award by the Boston Municipal Research Bureau. The Shattuck Award honors City of Boston professionals for their dedicated service to the Boston community.

As Director of the Office of Public Health Preparedness, Stacey Kokaram has been integral to both the MIC and COVID-19 emergency response and planning. Thank you Stacey!

GOLD STANDARD FOR CITY HEALTH

The BPHC earned a Gold Medal Rating for the fourth year from CityHealth. CityHealth assesses how cities fare on the number and strength of their evidenced-based policies that help millions of people live longer and better lives in vibrant communities.

JETBLUE HEALTHCARE HEROES

Three BPHC staff were recognized as JetBlue Healthcare Heroes. Awarded in summer of 2020, Fred, Yailka, and Mario were honored as deserving public health and first responders on the frontlines of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Fred Gary, Deputy Chief, Public Safety, Administration and Finance

Yailka Cardenas, Associate Bureau Director, Recovery Services

Mario Chaparro, Program Director, Engagement Center & Street Outreach, Recovery Services
**ADMINISTRATION & FINANCE**

- **333** new hires
  - **152** Regular
  - **92** Client Workers
  - **89** Temps

- **241** Active Requisitions (Job Openings) posted

Enrolled **132** employees in BPHC Health Benefits

- **250** virtual private network (VPN) clients installed.

**CHILD, ADOLESCENT & FAMILY HEALTH**

Boston Healthy Start Initiative served
- **394** children
- **270** pregnant women
- **277** post-partum women

Healthy Baby Healthy Child provided case management, advocacy and nursing services for:
- **770** children
- **429** pregnant women
- **630** post-partum women

Healthy Start in Housing housed **20** families and provided supportive advocacy and nursing

- **4,623** visits to School-Based Health Centers

- **213** students served through YDN Case Management

**COMMUNITY INITIATIVES BUREAU**

- **2,276** people attended Summer and Fall Fitness classes

Injury prevention provided **188** window guards, **644** helmets, **571** home safety supply kits

- **63** inspections of **48** cases of lead poisoning

- **1,350** New Smoke Free Housing Materials distributed

- **1,570** permits issued to regulated businesses

**CONSORTIUM FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

- **26** updates to **2153** Community Health Workers and Supervisors

- **38** weekly Learning@BPHC emails distributed to staff

**EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES**

- **71** Community EMT Course Students

- **18** Resident Participants in OWD City Academy

- **34** EMT recruits completed the training academy

- **97%** patient satisfaction
**HOMELESS SERVICES**

- **195,793** shelter nights provided
- **535** average number of individuals provided emergency shelter per night
- **154** individuals were diverted from entering homelessness

Conducted **3,671** COVID-19 tests

Provided **238** people in home case management services to prevent them from returning to homelessness

- **99** participated in our workforce job experience program

Provided **656,108** meals through Serving Ourselves Quincy Street Kitchen

- **12,957** patient visits for on-site medical clinic and recovery and behavioral health services

**INFECTIOUS DISEASE**

- **2,2725** residents attended **53** workshops and presentations on ID
- **49,529** investigations of reports of communicable diseases, exposures, and outbreaks

- **41,475** COVID-19 cases
- **575** Flu brochures and **6,884** STI brochures distributed to 9 organizations

Education and Community Engagement staff attended **41** community events around Boston

- **5,186** clients served by Ryan White Program providers

- **$12,772,607.00** in Ryan White Part A funds distributed to **33** organizations in Boston EMA

**INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS**

- Participated in **12** active coalition memberships

- Prepared **27** speakers for public hearings and meetings

- Submitted **3** responses to the federal comment period

**PUBLIC HEALTH PREPAREDNESS**

- Estimated reach of $3.5mm in funding to organizations
  - **6,500** BPS Parents
  - **4,500** Children under 5
  - **4,100** Disabled
  - **8,000** Elders
  - **9,000** Immigrants
  - **2,400** Pregnant women
  - **2,800** Returning citizens
  - **8,000** Students
  - **2,500** Veterans
  - **8,100** Youth

**RECOVERY SERVICES**

- **85** Naloxone Overdose trainings
- **2,696** individuals trained in overdose prevention
- **43** clients admitted to Entre Familia and 81 to Wyman Recovery Home for residential treatment programs

- **5,541** calls to the PAATHS Hotline/311 for SUD referrals

- **368** home visits by the Post-Overdose Response Team

- **15,204** Naloxone kits distributed

- **1,416** reported reversals

Syringe return rate of **138%**

**RACIAL EQUITY & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

- **5** Racial Justice Health Equity virtual staff cafes

Request for Information was distributed to over **1,000** community partners

Residents and organizations offered over **200** policy and practice recommendations

**RESEARCH AND EVALUATION**

Hosted **18** presentations of data