

**Louisiana Commission on HIV, AIDS and Hepatitis C Education,
Prevention and Treatment**

August 7, 2020

10:00 am – 12:00 pm

Virtual Meeting

<https://zoom.us/j/7789959325>

Or Telephone:

USA 602 333 0032

Conference code: 712643

Commission Members Present:

Alexander Billioux, Amanda Dumas (proxy for Marcus Bachhuber), Andrea LaPlante, Angie Brown, Anthony Basco, Austin Matthews, David Mushatt, DeAnn Gruber, Fran Lawless, George Nawas (proxy for Kathleen Kennedy), Jacqueline Porter, Mitchell Handrich, Norma Porter, Tamachia McCaa, Tanya Brown, Tavell Kindall

I. Call to Order

II. Roll Call

Dr. Gruber took a roll call of Commission members and their designees.

III. Old Business: May Minutes

Commission members reviewed the minutes from the May meeting. Tavell Kindall moved that the minutes be accepted. Alexander Billioux seconded. The motion passed.

IV. New Business: Ending the HIV Epidemic (EHE) Brief Update

EHE teams from across the state gave updates on their respective EHE work.

Baton Rouge-Mathilde Silverberg: The team is working with BACH TCS, a consulting group from New Orleans to host focus groups and distribute provider surveys. The provider surveys should be distributed next week via Redcap data collection system. The focus groups will be online due to COVID-19 and the team will host a virtual EHE Commission meeting on August 25th. Lastly, commission leaders are working with IAPAC (International Association of Providers of AIDS Care) Fast Track Cities to create the Baton Rouge HIV data dashboard.

New Orleans-Fran Lawless: NOLA EHE planning Coordinators have conducted 8 focus groups over the past 2 weeks. Staff presented one page summaries in advance so participants could be aware of the four pillars for the EHE plan. The focus groups have produced a lot of positive feedback and they are trying to integrate the CDC EHE plan with the HRSA and Fast Track Cities plans to be as effective as possible. Contact franny@norapc.org, keshante@norapc.org or flawless@nola.gov for more information.

Statewide Planning- Jenny Holl: The statewide planning group has been working with their steering committee, core team and SHHP staff around messaging and named the statewide plan

“Get Loud Louisiana!” This team wanted the plan to be different and amplify the voices of people living with HIV and others impacted to talk more openly about sexual health and the barriers people are facing when it comes to health and well-being. In addition to wanting to meaningfully involve people living with HIV, it was acknowledged that music brings us together as a state, so that was included in the design and overall messaging for the statewide planning efforts. The goal is to be community-driven and intersectional between other topics such as human rights. Women with a Vision staff hosted two virtual town halls where 80 community members participated and provided input on the goals, objectives, and strategies of the statewide plan. The subcommittees are working on developing activities for how the work will be completed to meet the identified goals. There are five subcommittees, a core team and steering committee. There are two community member positions that are vacant on the core team and are looking for representation in rural communities. To get involved, reach out to jenny.wwav@gmail.com and website www.getloudlouisiana.org.

V. New Business: DOC/HCV Testing update – Elizabeth Britton

Elizabeth Britton, OPH Nurse Practitioner who works in the Department of Corrections, provided an overview of the current Hepatitis C (HCV) testing and treatment services for persons who are incarcerated in a DOC facility.

To date, the mobile testing teams have completed screenings at four DOC facilities and there have been 3,779 incarcerated individuals screened for HCV; amongst them, 481 were identified as positive for Hepatitis C. The percentage of positivity found at each facility is comparable to other facilities, even though populations may be different. Although DOC had been treating Hepatitis C since 2000, treatment was limited to those with severe liver disease. However, with the new agreement between Louisiana and Asegua Therapeutics, individuals who test positive for Hepatitis C are now prescribed Epclusa. With this new treatment, more people can complete their full treatment regimen with far less side effects.

Once the number of persons being diagnosed with COVID-19 occurred, specifically during April and May, no new prescriptions were dispensed as staff pivoted their focus to COVID prevention. Dispensing was restarted in June and July.

Testing and treating in the time of COVID has been challenging. Currently, staff can only go to facilities without cases of COVID. Pre-COVID, staff were visiting each facility and conducting mass testing. As inmates enter the DOC system, they are screened during the intake process for HIV, Hepatitis A, B, and C, and syphilis. Due to COVID, inmates are now allowed to get one month of medication at a time. At the next Commission meeting, DOC staff plan to give an update about linkage to care programs they are doing with OPH. For questions, contact Elizabeth.britton@la.gov.

Questions:

Dorian Alexander asked if there are persons of Trans experience at DOC. Jean Schexnayder said there are, but DOC doesn't capture that information (gender identity). Dorian Alexander asked if there was any data to report related to COVID cases for people who are incarcerated and staff.

Stacye Falgout said on the DOC website, they report all of their COVID data. D. Alexander said he was curious to know what is being done to reduce COVID in facilities. S. Falgout stated that all incarcerated persons are wearing masks, staff wear masks, persons are screened for symptoms upon entry, and visitation and court is being conducted via video.

Alexander Adams asked if it is possible to get an update for Hepatitis C for parish prisons that have DOC contracts. E. Britton said they are concentrating on the seven DOC-administered facilities and the remaining facilities will follow. They are working with a five year plan to test as many in the current facilities as possible. E. Britton added that when someone is released from DOC, they also test them for HIV and Hepatitis C before they leave since there is potential for re-infection of Hepatitis C.

Jacqueline Porter asked if they are screening for Hepatitis C at Jetson. E. Britton shared that part of the female population is at Hunt and part is at Jetson and individuals at both of those have been screened.

Angie Brown asked if there are particular services they are providing for people who test positive for HIV for linkage to care? E. Britton said yes, that has been in place prior to the Hepatitis C elimination program. J. Schexnayder said they have been providing medical release advice since 2008, where they link individuals to medical care, ADAP and Ryan White case management. The client selects which organization to receive case management, then they set up a virtual meeting between the individual and the case manager to initiate the first meeting prior to being released.

Contact Stacey.falgout@la.gov

VI. New Business: Epi Overview and Update-Jessica Fridge

Jessica Fridge, Surveillance Manager of OPH's STD/HIV/Hepatitis Program (SHHP) presented a comprehensive epidemiological overview of HIV, STI, and HCV updates in Louisiana. Her last update to the Commission was October 2019.

Key takeaways: CDC's 2019 national rankings have not been released yet, but that typically occurs in late November/early December and OPH SHHP will release an update in March/April to show any further changes in data. As of the most recent update from CDC (2018), Louisiana ranks 4th for HIV diagnosis rate and 4th for AIDS diagnosis rate; Baton Rouge ranked 3rd for HIV diagnosis rate, 10th for AIDS diagnosis rate; New Orleans ranked 7th for HIV diagnosis rate and 5th for AIDS diagnosis rate. There was a 26% decrease of persons newly diagnosed with HIV in Louisiana between 2014 - 2019. In 2019, there were 893 persons newly diagnosed across the state, reflecting the lowest number in a single year since the late 1980s.

Remaining information can be found in the slide deck attached. For questions, contact: jessica.fridge@la.gov.

Questions:

Lorna Seybolt asked about what the percent positivity rate is for HIV cases over the past two years. Jessica Fridge said they can't report statewide percent positivity, because the state does not yet have a full year of negative tests reported. The goal in the future is to calculate percent positive.

Tonya Brown asked about insurance status for those who are virally suppressed. Health insurance data are collected on individuals who are receiving services through a Ryan White funded program, but SHHP does not have insurance status for all of those living with HIV.

VII. Other Business: Announcements - None

VIII. Public Comment:

Dorian-gray Alexander asked to all, what lessons are we learning and what challenges are we experiencing with two pandemics happening at once (HIV and COVID)? Are there any impacts on services, care, treatment and testing, and are providers starting to determine how we can improve things for HIV with the current context? Dr. Billioux commented that both of these epidemics demonstrate the sustaining impact of health disparities, especially racial and gender biases on people's health outcomes. We are trying to build systems to address those disparities and the data show us to continue to identify opportunities to secure resources and implement studies to address health disparities. With COVID, we don't have resources to address all the findings and we still have a lot of work ahead of us. A positive note is that COVID forced the medical community to implement services that have been needed for a long time, such as telemedicine so that people could be served where they are.

Samantha Euraque said each region is very different and that COVID has impacted linkage to care. The shift to providing treatment more quickly, while working with telemedicine and COVID is beginning to happen more often.

Jen Laws asked about the intersection of COVID and HIV, what community engagement efforts or utilization of community engagement efforts are being done to address COVID? Dr. Billioux commented that Regional Medical Directors are reaching out to stakeholder groups and OPH has been tackling medical systems coordination. Dr. Gruber said she knows Dr. Earl Benjamin from LDH is working to engage certain stakeholder groups with COVID messaging and communications. Jacky Bickham commented that SHHP does have community health workers and they have conducted tele-engagement to ensure community members are accessing services that immediately needed. Moving forward, there is a plan to have CHWs in all regions of the state. Jen Laws stated that there are failures occurring with COVID that have already occurred with HIV and how can we learn from those? Dr. Billioux commented that the pace of COVID has been a challenge and that if we have systems that can respond to this, then local organizations should work with them as quickly as possible. Advocacy groups are the best way to advocate to the federal government for funding and other resources.

IX. Next Meeting Date: Will be scheduled for October as this is a bi-monthly meeting.

X. Adjournment: Anthony Basco made a motion to adjourn, Mitch Handrich seconded.