Thursday, July 20, 2023 7:35 – 8:50 AM

Members present: Alex Babaian, Mike Bellissimo, Leslie Clapp, Louise Clough, Betsy Edge, Marcy Holmes. Lewis Laskaris, Bob Laskowski, Marina Lent, Lisa Nagy, Chantale Patterson, Dan Pesch, Kathleen Samways, Susan Sanford, Joyce Stiles Tucker, Christine Todd, Mary Jane Williams. Guests present: Cathy Wozniak, Bill Rovero, Lea Hamner.

**Call meeting to order / Approval of June 15 meeting minutes:** Vice Chair Leslie Clapp called the meeting to order at 7:35 AM. The June minutes were moved, seconded, and approved.

**Request for Testimony in support of the MV Housing Bank** – Louise Clough said that Laura Silber, the MC Commission’s Island Housing Planner has asked for written testimony in support of the MV Housing Bank. There will be a hearing in the Joint Committee on Revenue on July 25. Louise will forward the information and templates for testimony to Council members after this meeting and will talk to Mary Jane Williams this morning to develop a letter of support from the DCHC. Individuals and/or their organizations should also provide testimony, as the volume of support from the public is important.

**Island Health Care’s grant application to conduct a substance use disorder community data sharing research project** – Kathleen Samways said that recently there was an opportunity for funding to conduct a substance use disorder community data sharing research project. Alexis Babaian put together the application and the Council’s Coordinating Committee wrote a letter of support. Letters of support were also provided by the SUD Coalition and the County. Alexis said that right now the application is not going forward – although the funding announcement said the deadline was in July, she learned that in fact the deadline was in June. There will be an opportunity to re-apply in the fall.

**SUD Coalition Update and Discussion** – Bill Rovero, Director of Community Initiatives, MV Community Services. Bill started by saying that he would talk about the SUD Coalition and will also talk about data – something he’s already been talking to Alexis about. He’s been coordinating the SUD Coalition for about five months and described it as a group that brings together stakeholders from a lot of organizations across the Island. (For more information, refer to Bill’s presentation which will be distributed to Council members after the meeting and considered part of the meeting minutes.) Bill started his work with the Coalition, by re-connecting with individuals and organizations already involved, and bringing a few more in. It is well understood that substance use is a major concern, and the past focus has primarily been on opioids. He started looking at available data and found that there is a lot – along with a lot of opinions about what we should be doing. After available data is collected and reviewed an analysis of gaps and needs will be done, then recommendations will be made. Sub-committees will be formed focusing on priorities from the data.

Bill already had a lot of data, including demographics and breakdowns by age and town of substance use and treatment. This information is in his slice presentation which, as mentioned above, will be sent out to Council members.

Lea Hamner, an epidemiologist, said that the Cape has the same issues and is ahead of us in addressing the problems. She suggested that we collaborate with Barnstable, and Christine Todd agreed.

In 2022, there were 1,500 police calls for SUD, behavioral health issues, etc. There is a co-responder program where a mental health clinician rides along with the police.

Over the next 10 years or so, each town on the Vineyard will receive municipal abatement payments as part of an opioid settlement (not including the Purdue Pharma settlement payments), with a total for the Island of almost $1 million. Bill characterized it as an unprecedented opportunity on the island to make a difference in the SUD landscape here and said that we need to make our voice heard to ensure that the funds are spent on programs with direct impact. Christine asked what the Health Council could do to track it and see that it’s going where it’s needed most. Bill has met with town administrators and health agents and agrees it would be good to get something in the papers.

**Data Collection/Sharing among Island Organizations** – Alexis Babaian said this initiative was out of the Council’s Data and Information Committee. She was able to interview all DCHC members/organizations to understand what kind of public facing data they had, as well as any type of data they collect as part of regulatory reporting in order to get an idea of what is out there. She has not yet been able to get information from the hospital or from Vineyard Complementary Medicine. Dan Pesch told her to contact him, and Susan Sanford said Alexis should reach out to her too. Information could be in an annual report, it could be qualitative information from staff, patients, etc. She’s now beginning to collect these assets if they do already exist. She will request the data in emails she will send to the individuals she’s already talked with. Data she’s collected is now on the Council’s Google Drive, but she’d like to get it on a page on the Council website. She’s thinking of a password protected website that members access. Bob Laskowski thanked her for all the work she’s done on this project and agreed the data needs to be available to Council members. Even though most of it is already publicly available having it in one place would make it much easier to find and use.

**Public Health Updates** – Marina Lent said she was turning over the presentation to Lea Hamner, who is working with the health agents through a grant this fiscal year. She has the most experience and training in infectious disease epidemiology. Here she’s working on tick-borne disease. There is a general understanding on the Vineyard about tick-borne disease, especially Lyme disease. An outreach plan will be developed – working with Marina, Patrick Rodon-Reynolds and Fernando Lama (who suggested reaching out to landscaping companies and specifically Portuguese landscapers who are at extremely high risk for tick bites). She’s trying to get quantitative data on people who don’t seek care when they have a tick bite, because they don’t want to take doxy (Doxycycline). This includes people who work in the sun – landscapers, lifeguards, gardeners (doxy can make you sunburn more easily). She claimed that she has never met anyone whose doctor talked to them about alternative antibiotics suitable for their working environments. Lisa Nagy said that she never prescribes doxy in the summer. Dan Pesch disagreed with Lea’s claims that doctors weren’t offering alternatives to doxy, saying that there are a lot of practitioners here who have much more knowledge than anyplace else in the state. He had just taken doxy but alternatives were offered to him. Mike Bellissimo also said that he took doxy for the first time this summer but alternatives were offered to him. He said that we have access, but more needs to be done about awareness.

Dan said that they’d had two well-attended grand rounds with Marina’s help regarding alpha-gal, tick borne illness, updates from CDC guidance regarding antibiotic treatment. He agreed with Mike about a lack of awareness – people who don’t live here full-time, here for a week or two, go back home with tick-borne illness including tularemia, and the cause of illness was never considered. When people do come to the emergency room they are able to get antibiotics immediately – an access problem for others since there is no 24-hour pharmacy on the Island.

Marina commented that awareness is an issue, and the boards of health are trying to reach out, especially to the landscaping community, where the risk of tick bites is high. Lisa Nagy suggested posting information on the ferries and at the airport so that once visitors got home and were sick they would know that they may have a tick-borne illness and should seek care, letting their physicians know about the situation.

**Other Member Updates** –

Kathleen Samways announced that Island Health Care will be continuing the vaccine outreach program, which they’ve partnered with Health Imperatives. COVID vaccine clinics haven’t been scheduled yet, but it’s anticipated they will happen this fall.

Dan Pesch said he doesn’t think we’ll have a formal rural scholars program this year. The program is being restructured but had thought there might be some nurse practitioners this year. He’s meeting with Suzanne Cashman tomorrow and hopes to find out whether this will happen.

Mike Bellissimo said that he met representatives from the Harvard Chan medical school, and his having a more formal meeting to see if there’s a possibility that students could spend a year doing their capstone project here in the Vineyard, on public health issues specific to our location.

**Meeting adjourned at 8:50 am**

**The next regular Health Council meeting will be held via zoom on September 21 at 7:30 am**

Respectfully submitted, Louise Clough, secretary