

# **State of Connecticut** ***Commission on Health Equity***

Meeting Summary, July 21, 2009

**Commission Attendees:** Michael Williams (Department of Children & Families – Hartford Office), James Gatlin (President of New Opportunities), Janet Williams (Department of Children & Families – Hartford Office), Ann Ferris (UConn Center for Public Health and Health Policy), Marsha Hurley (UConn Healthcare Opportunity Program Medical & Dental Schools), Jeannette DeJesus (Hispanic Health Council), Jim Rawlings (Connecticut NAACP), Marie Spivey (Capitol Workforce Partners), Stephanie Paulmeno (public member--Greenwich Department of Health), Kelson J. Ettienne-Modeste (Hartford Public Schools), Gregory Stanton (public member--Lawrence & Memorial Hospital), Lorraine Carrano (St. Vincent's Medical Center), Natasha Pierre (Permanent Commission on the Status of Women), Cheryl Harris Forbes (African-American Affairs Commission), Jose Ortiz (Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services), Kathy Greys (Urban League of Southern CT), Werner Oyanadel (Latino & Puerto Rican Affairs Commission), Marie Lopez Kirkley-Bey (State Representative 5<sup>th</sup> Assembly District), Troy Westbrook (ProHealth Physicians, Inc.).

**Other Attendees:**

**Administrative Attendees:** Victoria Veltri and Michael Mitchell (Office of the Healthcare Advocate)

All members were provided with a copy of the meeting agenda and a draft meeting summary from the retreat on 6/16/09. The approval of the minutes from the 6/16/09 retreat was postponed until the next meeting on 8/18/09. All members and other attendees were asked to sign-in to confirm attendance.

After introductions, the first item for discussion was approval of the draft meeting summaries from the Commission on Health Equity meetings on April 21, 2009 and May 19, 2009.

Victoria Veltri indicated that the Commission has two new members present: Marie Lopez Kirkley-Bey, State Representative 5<sup>th</sup> Assembly District, who was appointed by Denise Meryl for the Latino, Black and Puerto Rican Caucus of the General Assembly, and Marsha Hurley from UConn Healthcare Opportunity Program Medical & Dental Schools, replacing Bruce Carlson. Martha Burr's seat has not been replaced, but all others seats have been filled at this time.

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Jim Rawlings indicated that the main goal of this meeting was to provide and update to the Commission of the progress from the different clusters, Public Voice, Data and Policy committees, in an effort stay on track with the January, 2010 deadline of providing a report to the General Assembly and to the Governor.

Stephanie Paulmeno indicated that Dr. Williams and she have been working on putting together preliminary drafts of proposal addressing how the Public Voice Committee would be able to share information with the community in accordance with requirements of the State of Connecticut website development and email transmissions. Draft formats include techniques and strategies, such as hyperlinks to various agencies and contacts, forms, newsletters and websites, and holding focus groups for the purpose of information communication of what the Commission is all about, as part of the Communications Plan.

State Representative Marie Lopez Kirkley-Bey expressed her concern about “neighborhood people” retrieving and having access to this information, usually accessed at public libraries, and suggested this information be placed on local-free of charge newspapers, and for the forums announcement to be done through schools since this vehicle will be best for parents. Also, she recommended that the report be short and not too long in order to keep the legislators interest.

Jim Rawlings stressed the importance of each commissioner to ask questions to each cluster, during this structure period, about who, what, why, when and ask questions, so it is understood what they are doing and how it would impact health equity and avoid misunderstandings and/or assumptions.

Jose Ortiz advised the Commission that communication should be created on multilingual formats, which Stephanie Paulmeno indicated was addressed in the proposal.

Werner Oyanadel highlighted the need to reach out to the Latino media, as a way to disseminate information within that community; such as Spanish newspapers and television outlets. Jim Rawlings expressed concern about the readability challenges, meaning that such communication should be at a certain grade level so it is effective.

Janet Williams indicated that as a group the Commission needs synthesized what are the specific messages this body wants the community to understand and hear about the work of the commission’s key messages.

Gregory Stanton provided the Data work group status report. The group met twice and continues to focus on the four duties and powers: collect and analyze data, review and comment on the Dept. of Public Health’s Health Disparities Performance Measures,

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explore other successful programs in other sectors, and have the authority to collect and analyze government and other health data within the State of Connecticut.

In respect to data collection Gregory Stanton indicated that they have placed a high priority based on the January and June, 2010 deadlines as required by the enabling legislation. They have continue to define and focus on analysis of CT data from studies, such as the CT Health Data Scan, Kayser Women's Health CT report, NAACP Report 2007, Hispanic Health Council Report, Office Healthcare Access report on Preventable Admissions and the CT Health Disparities report released this year. The objective of going through these reports is to identify a number of focus areas to recommend to the full Commission as a concentrated effort. A criteria list will be developed to assist with identifying and defining priorities which should be available for the September meeting. The Data work group is also looking for supplemental data from the CT's Departments of Labor, Education and Correction that might be useful in the overall analysis.

In respect to the second duty, Gregory Stanton indicated that they have reached out to the CT Dept. of Public Health and have had a number of conversations, concluding that the State of CT can improve its participation in Healthy People Initiative 2020 by establishing more targeted and measurable goals, in an effort to make sure the State has a very organized process and help them to identify targeted areas and prioritize.

In respect to the third duty, Gregory Stanton indicated that they have placed a lower priority in this area and not much effort has been extended to date. In respect to the fourth duty, the CT Health Information Network, they have received the report provided by the Anne Ferris and a review has been done.

Jim Rawlings inquired about the State of Connecticut's health equity standing, in regards to how poorly we fair when compared to other states. Gregory Stanton explained that the reason for focusing on CT data is intended to contribute towards the development of measurable goals and targets for the efforts in the State of Connecticut, not to discount national data, but intended to help prioritize the work that can be done realistically between the present and January by making meaningful contributions and recommendations to the Governor. Marie Lopez Kirkley-Bey indicated that there are many reports on a national level that can be obtained through Congressman John Larson and Senator Dodd.

Stephanie Paulmeno inquired about the inclusion of Teenage Pregnancy and HIV infections raising rates in CT data. Gregory Stanton indicated that yes, the data working group is looking at various focus areas, however, they are focusing on reviewing that data sources at this point in time, which address and report on such trends. Jose Ortiz

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indicated that he had provided a study done at the Department of Mental Health and Addiction, which Gregory Stanton will make sure to include for analysis.

Jim Rawlings advised the Commission that from the Education committee, Paul Flinter wanted to make sure that the data from the Department of Education was integrated and reviewed by the Data committee. Gregory Stanton indicated that he did not believe they had received such data, but that he will look into it within the next 90 days or so. Kelson J. Ettienne-Modeste inquired about the inclusion of housing data, which Gregory Stanton indicated that certainly Connecticut housing data can be included as well and asked the Commission to suggest which information should be initially incorporated for review. Marie Lopez Kirkley-Bey indicated that the Commission on Children would be a great source and to reach out to Elaine Zimmerman at 240-0029.

Jim Rawlings asked the Commissioners to identify themselves if they were not part of a subcommittee. New members were encouraged to volunteer themselves to be part of any of the three subcommittees.

Marie Spivey reported that the Policy group has currently nine members and stressed the need to meet and move forward. One of the goals of this group is to gain the confidence and trust of the risks communities as unbiased, with a focus on populations facing health disparities with the purpose of articulating policy that influence and inform policy considerations, driven by data developed by the group. Policy will focus on systems change and not on individuals programs and/or services. The next Policy meeting will be held on August 4<sup>th</sup>, 2009 from 2:00 pm to 3:30 pm at the Hispanic Health Council.

Jeannette DeJesus presented an overview of the approach of the Policy group, which was discussed at the retreat. The group has agreed on a system approach to policy with a focus on a “face process” of listening information from members of different agencies and organizations across the State of Connecticut to assist on putting together an action agenda for the Commission, as to how to address health inequities. The second item that the Jeannette DeJesus shared was putting together a list of the five counties that have the largest percentage of ethnic-racial minorities that would facilitate the process of selecting the people invited to inform this group, which she will recommend to the Policy group as a possibly strategy approach. The ultimate goal is to be able to come back to the Commission and present the areas and categories across the State of Connecticut and be able to have a representative group that is agreed upon and invite for discussion. Jose Ortiz stressed the importance of been inclusive of Mental Health and Addiction in this process within the Policy committee.

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Marie Spivey indicated that communicating with the State of Connecticut Department of Public Health was extremely important and that a meeting with the Commissioner was conducted to effectively gather information and assure that they are a part of the process.

Marie Lopez Kirkley-Bey expressed concern about the recommendations from some State departments and costs, since it is imperative to speak to the legislators, Committee Chairs, who will be more frank and provide honest answers. She also indicated the failure of some State departments and the realities facing the state in relation to budget deficit.

Stephanie Paulmeno asked clarification about the degree the Commission fell under the Freedom of Information Act and the transparency of having meeting without public notice. Victoria Veltri indicated that yes, the Commission falls under this act since it is a public State entity. She encourage the Commission members to call OHA for advise and to make sure that the right answer is provided by FOIC. Jeannette DeJesus invited Victoria Veltri to participate at the Policy group meeting on August 4<sup>th</sup>, to further discuss and advise the group.

Ann Ferris applauded the idea about contacting the local directors of public health. In an advisory capacity with the City of Hartford, she indicated how interesting the process of creating a committee on critical health indicators has been. Many local health departments encounter challenges due to the inability to obtain data on a municipal level, which could be an issue for this commission. However, Ann Ferris indicated that many public health directors have very active programs working on how to deal with this issue.

Jeannette DeJesus invited Marie Lopez Kirkley-Bey to be part of Policy group, which she accepted.

Jim Rawlings asked the Policy leadership group if clarity was made in respect to the audience to be participant at the Public Voice and Policy focus groups. Marie Spivey indicated that indeed the committees have discussed this matter, that there will be an overlap, and that they will be attempting to clarify information, which will be “married” if you will, in order to be effective and be putout effectively.

Natasha Pierre indicated that the group needed to figure out how to go about presenting the information from the various individuals and their recommendations without necessarily identifying by name the specific person who shared the information, and make it as least complicated as possible. Victoria Veltri suggested never making the assumption that a conversation with a public official is off the record, because it isn't unless it was exempted.

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Stephanie Paulmeno stressed the importance of the having this Commission being proactive and have a multi-prong marketing approach: 1) to educate the people on what the expectations should be 2) to educate the doctors 3) to educate the legislators and the insurance people that these issues need to be addressed. Troy Westbrook added the need to highlight the community's interaction with the healthcare system, in order to have true value where everyone in the State of Connecticut service data equals out, and to push for equality in services rendered.

Marie Lopez Kirkley-Bey stressed the importance of the three working groups of asking the same questions of the different audiences, since there will be different variations of answers that somewhere in the middle the truth will lie.

Jim Rawlings shared with the group that the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Hospitals has a commenting section introducing cultural competencies in the review of all hospitals in the United States and encouraged the group to go online and get familiar with this information to hopefully draw some aspects of systemic change from there. Rawlings indicated that linguistics challenges are to be considered and that the Joint Commission approach is a good approach.

Kelson J. Ettienne-Modeste advised the group that education would be the piece that would bring this equation together the quickest.

The legislative update was provided by Jeannette DeJesus and Natasha Pierre. Jeannette DeJesus indicated that the legislature overrode seven of the governor's vetoes, including SustiNet. SustiNet, a healthcare system establishment, will have a board of directors to be chaired by Kevin Lembo and Nancy Whiteman. Natasha Pierre indicated that the provision one liner about physicians getting cultural competencies has gone through, and the other issue was the amended of the statute to add gender and address it as a disparity. Victoria Veltri indicated that in the SustiNet bill there is committee specifically devoted to racial and ethnic health disparities, and encouraged the Commission to join the discussion with that committee. Stephanie Paulmeno volunteered to be the contact person between the Commission and SustiNet. Natasha Pierre will be putting together a quick fact sheet about SustiNet and share with the Commission.

Victoria Veltri shared with the Commission an update about the Anthem hearing. Anthem's wants to raise some of the rates of their products in Connecticut by an average of 23% and some products up to 32%. A hearing was held yesterday at which Anthem justified their proposed rate increases. The Office of the Healthcare Advocate intervened on behalf of the consumer, in order to get to the reasons as why the rate increases were justified. A decision should be made within 30 days.

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Jim Rawlings inquired about the funding included in the proposed bill by the Commission. Natasha Pierre indicated that it is still unknown where it stands. Jim Rawlings further shared the importance of health equity which is encouraged by the President's leadership and priority on this issue, and provoking discussion and getting everyone involved. In regards to funding, Jim Rawlings indicated that the Commission is counting on funding from two funders: CT Health Foundation and the Universal Health Foundation. Victoria Veltri is looking into how to get the monies into the Commission, since these monies could be subject to bid. There is going to be a third funding engagement happening soon. Jim Rawlings also indicated that a response to the letter that was sent to the Governor, approximately two months ago, has not yet been received.

Gregory Stanton inquired about the status of the appointment of Elizabeth Kraus, who is an Asian-American awaiting formal appointment, who through contacts in this commission has demonstrated outstanding leadership and interests for the Commission. Jim Rawlings indicated that the Commission will continue to pursue her appointment.

The meeting was adjourned.

**Next Meeting:** 8/18/2009

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