

**CITY OF NORWALK  
BOARD OF HEALTH  
REGULAR MEETING  
AUGUST 22, 2023**

**ATTENDANCE:** Ken Lalime, R Ph; Joan McNeil, D.N.P.; Theresa Quell, PhD, R.N;

**OTHERS:** Deanna D’Amore, Director of Health; Brian Weeks, Program Director of Epidemiology and Informatics; Megan Faugno, Special Projects Manager; Margaret Watt, Positive Directions Prevention Director

This meeting was held via teleconference.

**CALL TO ORDER**

Ms. D’Amore called the meeting to order at 8:05 a.m. A quorum was not present at the start of the meeting, so the approval of minutes was moved to later in the meeting.

**SUBSTANCE USE/MENTAL HEALTH UPDATES**

**a. Programs & Initiatives**

Ms. D’Amore introduced Ms. Watt, Prevention Director at the non-profit organization called Positive Directions. She also is the Co-Chair of The Norwalk Partnership (TNP). TNP is the state-designated prevention coalition for Norwalk, working to prevent substance misuse in youth and young adults.

Ms. Watt then narrated a PowerPoint slide deck titled “Mental Health & Substance Abuse in Norwalk Youth”. This Partnership has 12 stakeholders which represent all the key sectors. The work is funded through the CDC and focused on use prevention. They also work with Norwalk ACTS on the social/emotional health.

**b. Data**

Ms. Watts shared data on the mental health of Middle and High School students regarding the number of students who feel sadness/hopelessness, those who have considered suicide, and those who have attempted suicide in 2021 and 2022. A bar graph showing the percentages of demographic groups of students was presented. According to the survey, it shows that those who identify as trans and non-binary have a significantly higher level of depression and suicide attempt than the average percentage across the school grades. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and its effects on youth mental health, the data collected in 2021 had a higher percentage than the recent data obtained from 2022. Although the percentages of the data have declined, the rates continue to be a priority.

A large percentage of the respondents reported irregular eating behaviors and high levels of anxiety.

The next slide focused on substance abuse involving alcohol, marijuana, nicotine/vaping, cigarettes and RX drugs through 2018 to 2022. The 11th and 12th graders are the largest cohort for substance abuse.

Ms. Watts said that there is often an underlying assumption of substance abuse, but the data indicates that the substance abuse is more of an outlier. There is a major effort to educate parents. They are seeking to change attitudes and if they perceive that the substances are harmful and their parents disapprove, they are less likely to use the substance. Students who think that their peers or parents don't disapprove are more likely to use marijuana.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the higher rates of usage of substance abuse has led to additional counselors in the schools, including a counselor that supports LGBTQ students and their mental health needs. Staff has received additional LGBTQ awareness training to support students and identify bullying against students. There has also been a Teens Night Out substance free initiative in the City. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, their social development is behind.

Norwalk is a city rich in resources and there are many support groups available. Opioid Prevention is underway via a digital campaign, bus ads in both English and Spanish, posters in pharmacies, and overdose awareness about Narcan. Narcan has been legalized and available over the counter. They will be hosting a training program about Overdose Emergencies for restaurant and bar staff.

Ms. Watt then displayed a list of Behavioral Health Support resources. The Drug Free Community funding sponsored by the CDC, which will be discontinued after two cycles of funding. She encouraged everyone to check out the Positive Directions website.

Ms. McNeil asked how many students participated in the survey. Ms. Watt said that they had a very large response of over 3,000 students.

Mr. Weeks greeted everyone and gave a quick overview of the recent Emergency Department visits involving substance abuse. He displayed the disclaimers/reminders of the study on screen. Mr. Weeks narrated the data which were compiled by zip codes.

### **SUPPORTIVE WORK ENVIRONMENT POLICY**

Ms. D'Amore then presented a slide deck on the Supportive Work Environment Policy. She said that the department will be utilizing the Surgeon General's Framework for Workplace Mental Health and Well-being as a guide for the policy. There are five different categories in the

framework, including Protection from Harm, Opportunity for Growth, Mattering at Work, Work-Life Harmony, and Connection and Community.

Ms. D'Amore said that they would be organizing five team meetings in September and October. The team meetings will include the planning team and any other staff members interested in participating. She said that they would be discussing the examples of support that were already in place, potential weaknesses, and potential suggestions. Discussion followed.

### **WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT FUNDING**

Ms. D'Amore then announced that the Department had been awarded grant funding that can be used over the next four years on workforce development. She displayed a slide showing the various categories where the funds could be used. She noted that they should help the staff recover from the pandemic and support their growth and professional development.

### **BEHAVIORAL HEALTH 360 INITIATIVES**

The National Association of County and City Health Officials – NACCHO – has focused on mental health issues by providing people with resources through Credible Minds. They have a digital platform that addresses mental health awareness and resources. Ms. Quell said that this was providing a trusted site where people could access the resources. Ms. McNeil asked if they had emergency numbers. Ms. D'Amore said that she would look into this.

### **APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES**

#### **• July 25, 2023 Meeting Minutes**

**\*\* MS. QUELL MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE JULY 25, 2023 MEETING MINUTES.**

**\*\* MR. LALIME SECONDED.**

**\*\* THE MOTION TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE JULY 25, 2023 MEETING MINUTES AS SUBMITTED PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

### **DIRECTOR'S REPORT**

Ms. D'Amore said that they had been working on reorganizing the Health Department for the past few years in order to meet the new needs. She listed several areas where the Department has been upgrading and updated positions. She noted that often the funding is allocated by need. She then displayed an updated draft of the Health Department Organizational Chart. The goal is to clarify the various functions for the positions.

## **EPIDEMIOLOGY UPDATES**

Mr. Weeks said that there had been a number of new COVID cases and the newest strain has about 36 mutations. It is expected that the number of cases will continue to rise because the school year is starting in less than a week.

Mr. Weeks said that there had been one confirmed human case of West Nile virus in Connecticut. Norwalk, New Canaan, Stamford and Darien have had mosquitos that tested positive for West Nile virus.

The Powassan virus, caused by infected ticks, was identified in four Connecticut residents this year. The cases are limited at this time and has only been detected in counties outside of Fairfield County. There were some fatalities from it last year, but none have been recorded this year. He then reviewed the safety precautions for preventing the two diseases.

## **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

There was no one present from the public at this time.

## **ADJOURNMENT**

Ms. D'Amore adjourned the meeting at 9:21 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

S. L. Soltes  
Telesco Secretarial Service