

El Paso County Public Health (EPCPH) Director’s Report

To: The El Paso County Board of Health

From: Susan Wheelan, M.B.A., Public Health Director

Date: February 2025 (reflects activity in January 2025)

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In the News

- EPCPH Executive Director Susan Wheelan announced she will retire effective March 3, 2025, after a 25-year career with the agency. Wheelan joined EPCPH as an environmental health specialist in 1999 and rose through the ranks, assuming the agency’s top job in February 2019. As director, she led the agency through the COVID-19 pandemic and oversaw numerous milestones, including workforce expansion, advancements in behavioral health care and the establishment of the Public Health Data and Analytics program.
 - To access the Gazette/Tribune article, click on the following link: [El Paso County Public Health Director to step down after 25 years](#)
 - To access the KOAA story, click on the following link: [Time to retire: Susan Wheelan leaving El Paso County Public Health after 25 years](#)
 - To access the FOX21 story, click on the following link: [Executive Director Retiring in March](#)
- The January edition of the **New Falcon Herald** featured an article from EPCPH Co-Medical Director Dr. Paul Mayer highlighting the importance of mental health and well-being, which was identified as one of the leading health issues in El Paso

County in EPCPH's Community Health Assessment (CHA). The article also connects residents to key resources such as 988, the Crisis Lifeline, Pikes Peak Rising 360, and more. To read the article, click on the following link: [Mental health and well-being resource for EPC communities](#)

- During National Radon Action Month every year in January, EPCPH urges residents to test their homes for radon. Air quality program manager Duane Dominguez was featured on KKTV and FOX21 highlighting radon—a colorless, odorless, tasteless, radioactive gas which can be found in high levels in nearly 50 percent of Colorado homes. Dominguez noted that radon is the second leading cause of lung cancer and stressed the importance of residents testing their homes.
 - To access the KKTV story, click on the following link: [Almost 50% of Colorado homes have unhealthy levels of 'cancer-causing radon'](#)
 - To access the Yahoo Life/FOX21 story, click on the following link: [Homeowners urged to test homes for cancer-causing radon](#)
- EPCPH co-medical director Dr. Bernadette Albanese was featured in several news stories highlighting the main illnesses circulating across the region - flu, Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV), COVID-19 and norovirus. She urged community members to stay home when sick, wash hands frequently, cover their mouths when coughing or sneezing, and encouraged those who are comfortable to get vaccinated.
 - To access the KOAA story, click on the following link: [With flu and RSV on the rise in Colorado, how those in the Springs are trying to keep healthy](#)
 - To access KKTV story, click on the following link: [Illnesses on the rise across the community](#)
 - To access the Yahoo News/FOX21 story, click on the following link: [What's going around right now? Health Department on stomach, respiratory illnesses](#)
- Several media outlets highlighted an outbreak of Pertussis (whooping cough) at Jenkins Middle School in El Paso County. The stories highlighted what determines an outbreak, symptoms to watch for, and when to contact medical providers. This was the first outbreak of pertussis in 2025.
 - To access the Gazette article, click on the following link: [Jenkins Middle suffers whooping cough outbreak](#)
 - To access the KKTV story, click on the following link: [Whooping cough local outbreak confirmed at Colorado Springs middle school](#)

- o To access the KOAA story, click on the following link: [Whooping cough outbreak traced back to Jenkins Middle School students says El Paso County Department of Health](#)
- o To access the FOX21/Yahoo News story, click on the following link: [EPCPH: Jenkins MS students affected by pertussis outbreak](#)
- o To access the KRDO story, click on the following link: [Health officials report whooping cough outbreak involving Jenkins Middle School students](#)
- o To access the KVOR story, click on the following link: [Whooping cough outbreak at Jenkins Middle School](#)

Agency Operations

In 2008, the Colorado Public Health Act required the State Board of Health to establish, by rule, the core public health services that each county and district public health agency must provide or assure as well as establish minimum quality standards for those public health services. A revised ruling ([6 CCR 1014-7](#)), effective January 1, 2020, now requires state and local health departments in Colorado to ensure provision of seven Foundational Capabilities and five Foundational Services. To learn more, click on the following link: [Colorado Local Public Health and Environmental Resources](#)

EPCPH fulfills its statutory requirement of providing these core public health services through the work of its divisions and programs. Activities supporting these services for the timeframe of this report follow.

Staffing Update

The agency's turnover rate has fluctuated from 18.2 percent in 2019 to 31.6 percent in 2022. EPCPH turnover decreased to 23.4 percent in 2023 and 22.8 percent in 2024 and is at 1.6 percent year-to-date in 2025. Turnover is measured by the number of separations per month divided by the average number of full-time employees (as verified by the Society for Human Resource Management). It does not account for internal employee movements such as promotions, transfers, retirements, county transfers, etc. The national turnover rate in 2022 in the Public Health sector was 46 percent, according to the Public Health Workforce Interest and Needs Survey (PH WINS). National turnover rates are provided every two years and data for 2022 will be captured in the 2024 PH WINS.

Foundational Public Health Capabilities

Assessment and Planning

2025 marks EPCPH's reaccreditation year with the Public Health Accreditation Board (PHAB), a process that demonstrates the department continues to meet rigorous standards for quality and performance. To support this effort, an internal Reaccreditation

team has been established, consisting of designated domain leads, with representation from divisions across the agency, responsible for overseeing documentation and compliance for each of PHAB's 10 domains. This structured approach ensures efficient collaboration across programs, timely progress tracking, and alignment with PHAB standards to maintain EPCPH's accreditation.

Communications

EPCPH was featured in a variety of timely television and print news coverage stories in January, including features on the retirement of Executive Director Susan Wheelan, the importance of mental health and well-being, and the rise of respiratory illnesses across the county. The TV and print news coverage resulted in a total of 77 stories totaling nearly 13,777,100 in local viewership and \$360,738 in local earned media value. Of note, several stories garnered national coverage this month, leading to substantial increases in viewership.

The EPCPH communications team is collaborating with the El Paso County Budget Office to finalize the 2025 Budget Book. The Budget Book, which reflects EPCPH's values of integrity, transparency and accountability, is produced annually to ensure fiscal transparency and provide key financial information to El Paso County residents and stakeholders.

Partnerships

The Immunizations program conducted several outreach vaccination clinics in January, including clinics held at Springs Rescue Mission and Fountain Valley School, meeting community members where they are in order to help prevent disease and strengthen partnerships.

EPCPH's Reproductive Health Clinic, Immunization and Care Coordination teams provided resources and services to nearly 30 individuals at the Springs Rescue Health Fair. Three testing appointments were made, and eight vaccinations were administered.

EPCPH's Care Coordination and Reproductive Health Clinic participated in Homeward Pikes Peak's Second Annual Stand Up for Our Community event on Jan. 23, 2025. The Care Coordination team distributed 40 hygiene kits, 36 Narcan Kits, and a variety of essential items such as nail clippers, notebooks, emergency blankets and lip balm. Staff were able to connect with more than 200 individuals.

The Tuberculosis (TB) Clinic staff attended two meetings with Lutheran Family Services to meet new staff and learn about the latest resettlement activities data over the last quarter, fostering continued connections and points of contact for referrals for TB assessment, testing and treatment.

Policy Development and Support

The 2024-2028 Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP) is in final form and will be presented to the Board of Health at its regularly scheduled February meeting. Pending board input, the CHIP is anticipated to launch in early 2025. This community-driven plan outlines actionable steps to address the leading health issues identified in the 2023 Community Health Assessment (CHA). It sets clear goals and objectives for each priority area, emphasizing collaborative efforts to drive change through cross-sector community partner engagement. Upon completion and approval, a comprehensive launch plan has also been developed to share the CHIP with both internal and external audiences.

The Public Health Data & Analytics (PHDA) program partnered with the El Paso County Coroner's Office to create annual maps of overdose deaths and fentanyl-related deaths to help visualize the impact on the community, identify hotspots, and provide educational material for Coroner Office staff.

With board approval of the Region 16 Opioid Abatement contract at the December meeting, PHDA's epidemiologist has engaged weekly with Colorado Springs Utilities (CSU) to kick off the project. This has resulted in the recruitment of community prevention partners for focus groups in February and the identification of 16 data sources for the needs assessment phase of the project.

Organizational Competencies

The Quality Improvement (QI) team developed and implemented a self-paced online training, "Introduction to Quality Improvement," for EPCPH team members. It enhances staff understanding of QI principles, supporting the agency's commitment to continuous improvement. By building organizational capacity for evidence-based improvements, the training strengthens EPCPH's ability to deliver high-quality services and improve community outcomes.

The QI team has developed a new and comprehensive standard operating procedure for receiving and selecting QI project nominations recommended by EPCPH staff.

Emergency Preparedness and Response

The Emergency Preparedness and Response (EPR) team participated in the Pikes Peak Regional Office of Emergency Management (PPROEM) Multi-Agency Coordination Group (MAC) meeting. During the session, partners reviewed both the strengths and challenges encountered during the activation of the extreme cold weather sheltering plan. The meeting also served as the Integrated Preparedness Planning Workshop (IPPW), providing an opportunity to collaborate with jurisdictional partners on upcoming exercises over the

next three years. This process helps ensure alignment of resources to achieve shared objectives while addressing potential conflicts between priorities.

The EPR team continues to play a key role in supporting the development of the El Paso County Mass Violence Recovery Plan. While PPROEM, El Paso County Department of Human Services (DHS), EPCPH, El Paso County Sheriff's Office (EPSO), and Colorado Springs Police Department (CSPD) remain the core partners in crafting the plan, the list of partners and stakeholders is steadily growing. The first draft is expected to be submitted to the respective leadership by April 30.

EPR participated in a security assessment for the Strategic National Stockpile (SNS) Local Transport Site, coordinating with CSPD, Hazmat and PPROEM.

Determinants of Health

Foundational Public Health Services

Communicable Disease Prevention, Investigation and Control

As discussed at the December 2024 Board of Health meeting, the Communicable Disease (CD) program continued collaboration with schools related to mitigation and prevention of Pertussis (whooping cough) related to an ongoing increase in cases in school-aged children.

Environmental Public Health

Retail Food Establishments (RFE)

The RFE license renewal process is in the final stages, with many facilities paying their 2025 license renewal on time. The RFE team typically visits facilities with outstanding invoices in January in an attempt to facilitate payment at the time of visit. The team partners with a member of our support staff to assist in the process.

2025 renewals by the numbers:

- 2,579 of 2580 licenses renewed
 - 41 licenses were assessed a civil penalty due to not renewing by the deadline as required in the regulations/statute.

There is one outstanding facility with non-renewal, and our team is assessing that RFE's operating status.

In January, the EH division partnered with a local media station to provide education and information regarding a new media segment. This partnership provided education to the community related to the RFE program and the inspection process. This allowed EPCPH to partner with a local media outlet and provided the EH division with an opportunity to build skills among staff in the areas of communications and media interviews.

Onsite Wastewater Treatment Systems (OWTS)

The OWTS team held several industry and sector-specific meetings in January. These sector meetings included OWTS licensed installers, certified inspectors, certified operation and maintenance inspectors, and engineers. Each meeting was intended to communicate updated information and timely program changes. As a result of these meetings, the OWTS facilitated and increased partnerships with many industry professionals and gained consensus on changes to advance program initiatives and ensure effective education regarding EPCPH standards and expectations. To increase transparency and clear communication, notes are shared with all industry partners. These meetings also meet the requirement for continuing education units required to retain licensure with EPCPH.

Maternal, Child, Adolescent and Family Health

Nurse-Family Partnership (NFP) helped to connect enrolled clients to care by providing nearly 30 referrals on behalf of more than 20 families. These referrals were to housing assistance, mental health treatment, Medicaid, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), child care, dental services, lactation support, and Women, Infants and Children (WIC).

Maternal and Child Health (MCH) provided a social and emotional well-being training, which included an overview of Adverse Childhood Experiences and education on protective factors for improving healthy childhood outcomes. The training was provided to more than 130 individuals from Colorado Springs School District 11, Manitou Springs School District 14, Falcon School District 49, the Cultural Office of the Pikes Peak Region, and DHS.

MCH, in partnership with Colorado Springs School District 11, provided a keynote presentation and breakout session at the Early Childhood Educator Conference at Northeastern Junior College. The presentations focused on improving healthy childhood outcomes and the value of community partnerships. There were 100 participants at the keynote and nearly 50 participants at the two-hour breakout session.

SNAP for WIC provided a training to five Lutheran Family Services caseworkers. The training highlighted WIC services and strategies for clients participating in the program to best utilize their food benefits.

WIC received a mini-grant from the Colorado Breastfeeding Coalition and La Leche League of Mountain Plains to support a lactation skills training for WIC and NFP staff in March 2025.

Chronic Disease, Injury Prevention and Behavioral Health Promotion

The Pikes Peak Rising 360 platform is a free, online, web-based platform which promotes mental health awareness and community engagement, fostering preventive measures, early intervention, self-care and screening. As of Jan. 31, six months since the launch, over 6,600 people have used the platform to access self-help mental health resources and assessments.

Appendix A: Environmental Health Activity

Environmental Health	January 2025	2025 Total	2024 Total	2023 Total
Air Quality Construction Activity Permits	12	12	118	136
Air Quality Open Burn Permits	3	3	33	51
Air Quality Complaints	1	1	33	23
Animal Bites Reported	96	96	1331	1171
Body Art Routine Inspections	4	4	121	112
Body Art Follow-up Inspections	0	0	2	7
Body Art Complaints	2	2	19	31
Child Care Routine Inspections	17	17	199	202
Child Care Follow-up Inspections	1	1	11	6
Child Care Complaints	2	2	21	20
Child Care Outbreak Investigations	2	2	N/A	N/A
Child Care High Risk Field Consults	5	5	46	12
Land-Use Planning Review	16	16	248	204
OWTS Pumper Truck Inspections	3	3	96	77
OWTS Final Inspections	25	25	445	551
OWTS Partial Inspections	6	6	138	227
OWTS Application Design Reviews	11	11	368	490
OWTS Design Revision Requests	3	3	52	120
OWTS Design Revision (add) Requests	1	1	9	63
OWTS New Permit Applications	8	8	166	232
OWTS Repair Permit Applications	10	10	252	266
OWTS Modification Permit Applications	3	3	16	19
OWTS Acceptance Doc for Title Transfer	40	40	726	731
OWTS Soil and Site Evaluations	14	14	277	376
OWTS Complaints	2	2	26	30
OWTS O&M Systems	6	6	141	155
Recreational Water Safety Inspections	20	20	289	313
Recreational Water Follow-up Inspections	0	0	18	22
Recreational Water Complaints	0	0	14	14
RFE Routine Inspections	183	183	2431	2478
RFE Re-Inspections	16	16	227	319
RFE Complaint Investigations	48	48	474	517
RFE Inspections Resulting in Closure	0	0	N/A	N/A
RFE Plan Reviews	24	24	291	210
Foodborne illness EH investigations	2	2	9	19
School Routine Inspections	4	4	29	23
School Complaints	2	2	13	15

School Self-Certification Audits	6	6	45	44
School Self-Certifications Returned	0	0	330	327
Waste Tire Facilities Routine Inspections	15	15	138	140
Waste Tire Complaints	0	0	1	2

Appendix B: Water Systems Testing

2024	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
Totals	647	607	642	699	830	702	786	678	745	745	587	569

2024	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
Public Water Systems	334											
Private Wells	303											
Totals	637											

Appendix C: Immunizations Program Vaccines Administered

2025 Month	Total Vaccines Administered	Vaccines Administered by the Mobile Team
January	1020	34
February		
March		
April		
May		
June		
July		
August		
September		
October		
November		
December		

*Number of vaccines administered by mobile team included in total vaccines administered column

Appendix D: Nurse-Family Partnership Client Visits

Month	2024 # of Client Visits	2025 # of Client Visits
January	241	264
February	252	
March	241	
April	272	
May	221	
June	229	
July	267	
August	236	
September	208	
October	259	
November	222	
December	200	

Appendix E: Disease Prevention and Control

Category	Disease	2025	2024	2023	2022
Food/Waterborne Diseases					
	Campylobacter	17	192	189	118
	Cryptosporidium	0	28	42	25
	Cyclosporiasis	0	28	8	10
	Giardia	6	73	68	47
	Hepatitis A	0	2	2	3
	Legionellosis	0	11	19	11
	Salmonella	8	117	89	54
	Shigella	5	57	46	57
	Shiga Toxin-producing E. coli (STEC)	3	63	59	42
	Vibriosis	0	10	9	7
Food/Waterborne Diseases Totals		39	581	531	373
Health care Associated Infections					
	Carbapenem-Resistant Acinetobacter	0	2	0	1

	baumannii (CRAB)				
	Carbapenem Non-susceptible Enterobacteriaceae (CRE)	10	57	58	47
	Carbapenem-Resistant Pseudomonas Aeruginosa (CRPA)	3	48	45	43
Health care Associated Infections Totals		13	107	103	91
Vaccine Preventable Diseases					
	Haemophilus influenzae (H. flu)	2	9	18	14
	Measles	0	0	0	0
	Meningococcal Disease	1	0	1	0
	Mumps	0	1	2	3
	Pertussis	11	141	24	29
	Rubella	0	0	0	0
	Varicella	1	24	33	21
Vaccine Preventable Diseases Totals		15	175	78	67
Respiratory Diseases					
	Hospitalized COVID-19	98	926	1,091	2,847
	Hospitalized Influenza*	167	470	266	529
	Hospitalized RSV	122	408	161	24
Respiratory Disease Total			1,804	1,518	3,400

*Flu Seasons:

- October 3, 2021- May 21, 2022; 188
- October 2, 2022- May 20, 2023; 399
- October 1, 2023-May 18, 2024; 547
- September 29, 2024- May 17, 2025; 271

Table 2 – Foodborne illness complaints received at El Paso County Public Health

2025 Month	Complaint Received Regarding Foodborne Illness	EH Foodborne Illness Investigation
January	40	2
February		
March		
April		
May		
June		
July		
August		
September		
October		
November		
December		

2024 Month	Complaint Received Regarding Foodborne Illness	EH Foodborne Illness Investigation
January	1	0
February	3	1
March	22	2
April	23	2
May	20	0
June	18	1
July	16	0
August	18	1
September	14	0
October	41	1
November	16	1
December	24	1

Table 3 – Annual rabies control activities

Year	Rabid animals total	Animal type
2025	0	Bats
2024	6	Bats
2023	2	Bats
2022	4	Bats

2025 Month	Rabies Related Calls	Animals Tested	Positive Results	PEP Recommendations
January	9	0	0	5
February				
March				
April				
May				
June				
July				
August				
September				
October				
November				
December				

Appendix F: Reproductive Health Clinic

Table 1 – Reproductive Health Clinic Client Visits

Month	2024 # of Client Visits	2025 # of Client Visits
January	195	170
February	181	
March	141	
April	184	
May	172	
June	191	
July	189	
August	129	
September	121	
October	132	
November	136	
December	153	

Appendix G: Tuberculosis Program

2025 Month	TB Cases Active/Latent	TB Rule Outs in Partnership with Community Providers	TB Direct Consultation to Community Providers
January	3/10	1	7
February			
March			
April			
May			
June			
July			
August			
September			
October			
November			
December			
Totals	3/10*	1	7

*Represents the total number of active TB and LTBI patients under treatment during 2025, regardless of when treatment began.

Definitions of Foundational Terms

Foundational Public Health Capabilities

Assessment and Planning - Colorado's governmental public health system will apply the principles and skilled practice of epidemiology, laboratory investigation, surveillance and program evaluation to support planning, policy and decision making in Colorado.

Communications - Colorado's governmental public health system will be a trusted source of clear, consistent, accurate and timely health and environmental information.

Policy Development and Support - Colorado's governmental public health system will inform and implement policies to meet the community's changing health needs. Public health policies will aim to eliminate health disparities, reduce death and disability, and improve environmental quality and health outcomes for all people in Colorado.

Partnerships - Colorado's governmental public health system will create, convene, and support strategic partnerships, engage community members and cross-sectoral partners, agencies and organizations to achieve public health goals.

Organizational Competencies – No official definition from CDPHE but this section will be used to report on QI, accreditation, finance/budget, governance, awards, etc.

Emergency Preparedness and Response - Colorado's governmental public health system, in coordination with federal, state and local agencies and public and private sector partners, will have the capability and capacity to prepare for, respond to, and recover from emergencies with health, environmental and medical impacts.

Social Determinants of Health - Colorado's governmental public health system will intentionally focus on improving systems and institutions that exacerbate health disparities so that all people and communities in Colorado can achieve the highest level of health possible. Governmental public health will have the requisite skills, competencies and capacities to play an essential role in creating comprehensive strategies needed to address health inequities, and social and environmental determinants of health.

Foundational Public Health Services

Communicable Disease Prevention, Investigation and Control - Colorado's governmental public health system will carry out state and locally coordinated surveillance, disease investigation, laboratory testing, and prevention and control strategies to monitor and reduce the incidence and transmission of communicable diseases. Programs will target illnesses that are vaccine-preventable, zoonotic, vector-borne, respiratory, food- or water-borne, bloodborne, healthcare associated, and sexually transmitted as well as emerging threats. Communicable Disease Control will collaborate with national, state and

local partners to ensure mandates and guidelines are met and timely, actionable information is provided to the public and to health professionals.

Environmental Public Health - Colorado's governmental public health system will use evidence-informed practices to understand the cause and effect relationships between environmental changes and ecological and human health impacts to protect, promote, and enhance the health of the community and environment. Agencies will participate in the protection and improvement of air quality, water, land and food safety by identifying, investigating and responding to community environmental health concerns, reducing current and emerging environmental health risks, preventing communicable diseases, and sustaining the environment in a coordinated manner with agencies at the federal, state and local levels as well as industry stakeholders and the public.

Maternal, Child, Adolescent and Family Health - Colorado's governmental public health system will develop, implement and evaluate statewide, regional and local strategies related to maternal, child, adolescent and family health to increase health and well-being, reduce adverse health outcomes and advance health equity across the life course. Strategies may include, but are not limited to, identifying and providing information, promoting evidence-informed and multi-generational approaches, identifying community assets, advocating for needed initiatives, and convening partners.

Chronic Disease, Injury Prevention and Behavioral Health Promotion - Colorado's governmental public health system focuses on common risk and protective factors that affect social, emotional and physical health and safety. To prevent chronic disease and injuries and promote behavioral health, Colorado's governmental public health system will use policy, systems and environmental change strategies to comprehensively address the root causes of poor health outcomes and advance health equity. Priority areas include, but are not limited to, nutrition, physical activity, oral health, access to care and disease management, injury prevention, violence prevention, suicide prevention, mental health, and substance use (including tobacco, alcohol and other substances).

Access to and Linkage with Healthcare - All Coloradans should be connected with and have access to needed personal health care services that include primary care, maternal and child health care, oral health care, specialty care, and mental health care.