

U.S.-México Border Health Commission (BHC)

Initiatives and Activities

Updated February 17, 2017

COOPERATIVE AGREEMENT ACTIVITIES

***U.S.-MÉXICO BORDER HEALTH MONTH (BHM)**

Each October, the BHC, in partnership with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), the México Secretariat of Health, and the 10 U.S.-México border states, sponsors *BHM*, a month long community health promotion initiative uniting communities in support of borderwide, sustainable partnerships that address border health challenges.

The initiative was initially established as Border Binational Health Week in 2004, and since then over 1.5 million border residents have participated in events and benefitted from resources provided.

Update: In 2016, BHC members determined to change the name of this initiative to the *U.S.-México Border Health Month* and celebrate it throughout the month of October rather than just one week. These changes are meant to increase awareness of the border region and the BHC's efforts to promote public health.

Partnerships for a Healthy Border has been identified as the new slogan/theme with a focus on Prevention-Precaution-Preparedness efforts. In addition to other planned events, a binational campaign is planned for the first week of October that aims to detect and prevent chronic disease through glucose and blood pressure screenings, and body mass index checks.

***Border Obesity Prevention (BOP) Strategic Plan**

Established as part of the *U.S.-México BOP Summit* held in 2013, the *BOP Technical Work Group* met in August 2014 to develop a comprehensive five-year strategic plan to reduce the incidence of obesity along the binational border. The strategic plan provides guidance on key priorities ranging from the binational sharing of best practices for obesity prevention programs to promoting grass-roots efforts that can lead to positive changes in the health environment.

The BHC then convened the BOP workshop on August 4–6, 2015 in Laredo, Texas to develop recommendations aimed at major impact policies and programs in addition to smaller projects along the border. Participants drafted a white paper to serve as a reference document for decision-makers and other stakeholders to identify issues and potential best practices specific to the border region.

Update: The white paper submitted by the Texas Office of Border Health is in final review and scheduled for release in the first half of 2017.

***U.S.-México Border Reproductive Health Initiative**

Through this initiative, the BHC aims to address reproductive health inequities and related issues impacting U.S.-México border populations and increase the region's visibility within global reproductive health. In 2014, the BHC held the first *U.S.-México Border Reproductive Health Summit* in San Diego, California, bringing together more than 190 researchers, practitioners, and policy leaders to advance evidence-based reproductive health practices, policies, and programs that support the safety and choices of women and girls on regional, national, and global levels. As a result, the *Border Reproductive Health Technical Work Group* was established to further examine and address reproductive issues pertinent in the border region.

The Work Group met on February 18–19 and April 15–17, 2015, to develop a strategic plan that can guide the BHC in its efforts to increase capacity building and information sharing between the border

states. In addition, members developed two strategic maps focusing on teen pregnancy prevention and maternal mortality. The met again on February 25–26, 2016, in San Diego, California to begin integrating the situational analysis, statistical data, and promising practices into a comprehensive format and a summary report.

Update: The Work Group continues to meet monthly via teleconference and is in the process of drafting a white paper.

***Healthy Border (HB) 2020 Initiative**

This initiative comprises measurable and binationally relevant goals and objectives that bring together key regional partners to develop and support policy change and culturally appropriate, evidenced-based interventions that address public health challenges prevalent along the border.

HB priorities include—

- Chronic degenerative diseases
- Maternal and child health
- Mental Health and Addiction
- Injury Prevention
- Infectious diseases
- Access to Care
- Research
- Strategic planning

The BHC released the [*Healthy Border 2020: A Prevention & Health Promotion Initiative*](#) report and officially launched the initiative at an event in Washington, D.C., in June 2015 as part of its binational annual meeting.

Update: The BHC continues to promote HB2020 and use it as a basis for other initiatives and activities as well as collaborations with other partners including the Environmental Protection Agency, Office of National Drug Control Policy, National Institutes of Health, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The BHC is continuing to identify how to effectively evaluate the strategies identified within the report.

***Leaders across Borders (LaB)**

LaB is an advanced eight-month leadership training program designed for public health professionals working to improve the health of U.S.-México binational border communities. Selected participants work binationally on border health-specific topics and earn a certificate from the *Instituto Tecnológico de Monterrey (Monterrey Institute of Technology)* upon completion of coursework. To date, 100 binational public health leaders have graduated from the LaB program.

There were over 85 applicants for the 2016 cohort, and a total of twenty participants were chosen, ten from each country and representing each border state. Participants were notified of their selection on March 7, 2016. The program includes an orientation, a retreat, and a graduation ceremony; and course work includes individual and team assessments, binational team projects, and curricula focusing on public health issues relevant to the border region.

Update: Participants completed the program on October 5-7, 2016 in Phoenix, Arizona. . The four binational projects of this cohort focused on addressing teen pregnancy, migration and health, binational prevention of chronic diseases focusing on cardiovascular health, and environmental health.

The Dan Reyna Award is granted every year to two recipients during the graduation exercises. This year, Barbara Jimenez, Office of Health and Social Services, San Diego County and Abelardo Garcia Cantu, Coordinator, Outreach Office of the USMBHC, Nuevo Leon, earned that distinction. The award honors the late Dan Reyna, former Executive Director of the USMBHC – U.S. Section, who dedicated his career to bringing together national, regional and local partners of both countries in support of improving health and quality of life of the border region.

***U.S.-México Border Tuberculosis Initiative**

This initiative was established as the Tuberculosis Consortium (TB Consortium) in 2011 as a result of previous meetings sponsored by the BHC focusing on specific aspects of TB. The TB Consortium convened public health and legal experts from binational federal, state, and local government, academic, and non-governmental organizations to advance action plans that reinforce binational and borderwide responses to TB issues, including addressing continuity of care, multidrug-resistant, and legal issues affecting binational TB case management.

Technical work groups established as part of the BHC's TB Consortium have completed or are working toward the following:

- **U.S.-México Legal Manual for TB Patient Continuity of Care**

In 2015, the U.S. Section of the BHC's TB Legal Issues Work Group completed its portion of a comprehensive manual, which identifies and describes U.S. laws and procedures for TB case management and transfer upon completion later this year.

- **U.S.-México Border Environmental Scan**

The BHC U.S. Section office, in coordination with the Director of the Office of Micobacteriosis at CENAPRECE México and the 10 border states, conducted a regional environmental scan to identify binational TB projects that serve border communities toward establishing an effective communication protocol.

Updates: The U.S. Section manual is currently undergoing an internal technical review. The New Mexico Office of Border Health is using the environmental scan as a basis to conduct a more in-depth analysis and evaluation of existing TB programs.

***Project Extension for Community Healthcare Outcomes (ECHO) Site Visit**

To promote key BHC/HHS priorities and initiatives, the BHC's MDR-TB Consultative Network of Experts identified a need for binational training to better address binational MDR-TB cases. Project ECHO was identified as a potential model to fulfill this need. Housed at the University of New Mexico (UNM) in Albuquerque, Project ECHO is a collaborative model of medical education and care management that empowers clinicians to provide better care to more people.

The BHC's MDR-TB Consultative Network of Experts participated in a live demonstration on March 18–19, 2015, provided by Project ECHO staff. The purpose was to identify the feasibility of coordinating complex binational MDR-TB cases between U.S. and Mexican clinicians and public health experts.

UNM Project ECHO staff provided a follow-up consult on September 3–4, 2015 for the BHC U.S. Section central office staff to assist the BHC to implement, administrate, and maintain Project ECHO from the central office in El Paso, Texas. As a result of this consult, BHC staff now observes clinics coordinated by UNM Project ECHO staff; the BHC and Project ECHO staff are identifying how to expand this model and technology for binational TB cases as well as potentially replicate it for other BHC initiatives.

Updates: No updates at this time.

BORDER HEALTH RESEARCH (BHR) INITIATIVE

The BHC established this initiative to identify strategies toward the development and implementation of a border health research agenda that outlines actions for improving the quality of life for all border residents. Representatives from more than 120 academic institutions have attended previous fora. The BHR Expert Panel consists of 8 U.S. and 12 Mexican researchers representing various academic institutions.

The BHR Expert Panel Meeting and accompanying BHR Forum was held on October 20–21, 2015 in Monterrey, Nuevo León. The overarching goal of the expert panel meeting was to develop a comprehensive binational research agenda that can inform border public health research and guide policies in both the United States and México.

The binational forum, which convened public health experts, researchers, government agencies, academic institutions, and non-governmental organizations from the United States and México, centered on the binational border health priorities as established by the BHC's [Healthy Border 2020 Initiative](#). The objectives of the forum included the following:

- Improve understanding of the production, dissemination, and transfer of knowledge of research in the border region
- Identify the needs in order to strengthen border health research
- Propose priorities for the research agenda in order to develop evidence-based actions and policies
- Promote the development and strengthening of the Binational Border Health Thematic Network

The forum included three break out groups focused on chronic-degenerative and infectious diseases, and maternal and child health; mental health, addictions, violence, accidents, and injuries; and strengthening research capacity and developing human resources. Each group developed recommendations for the BHC, the Expert Panel, and other stakeholders to move the research agenda forward. These recommendations are detailed in a summary report available on the BHC website, www.borderhealth.org.

Updates: No updates at this time.

COLLABORATION WITH FEDERAL PARTNERS

***BHC Collaboration with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)**

The BHC and EPA identified mutual areas of interest and collaborative efforts in support of the EPA's *Border 2020 Program* goals and the BHC's *HB 2020 Initiative* and other priorities. The BHC's *Community-based Healthy Border Initiative*, which includes *BBHW*, and EPA's focus area of air quality and asthma education awareness for Regions VI and IX are included in this collaboration.

The BHC U.S. Section collaborated with EPA to establish the Southwest Center for Pediatric Environmental Health (SWCPEH) in El Paso, Texas, in February 2015. The SWCPEH operates as a Pediatric Environmental Health Specialty Units (PEHSU) which are composed of public health experts in children's environmental health charged with improving the health of children by enhancing educational and consultative services to clinicians and other health professionals.

The BHC and EPA coordinated a series of one-day train-the-trainer events in 2015 for promotores in the following U.S. border cities that focused on air quality and asthma education as well as other relevant environmental health topics:

- August 10: Brownsville, Texas
- August 14: Edinburg, Texas
- August 26: Laredo, Texas
- August 28: El Paso, Texas/Las Cruces, New Mexico/Cd. Juárez, Chihuahua
- September 1: San Diego, California
- September 2: Imperial County, California/Yuma, Arizona
- September 15: Nogales/Douglas, Arizona

The BHC participated in the *Children's Environmental Health Symposium* in El Paso, Texas, on September 25, 2015. The two main purposes of this symposium were to increase knowledge of how early childhood exposures can affect children's health and to facilitate networking among the health care community, promotores, and the public.

The BHC also collaborated with the EPA Region IX on a *Children's Environmental Health Symposium* on January 27-28, 2016, in San Diego, California. Modeled after the El Paso Symposium, it included presentations on the BHC, HB2020, lead and mercury poisoning, community-based projects promoting child health, pediatric asthma, and climate change to name a few. A round-table discussion followed the Symposium to allow participants to formulate recommendations for addressing these issues.

Updates: The BHC-U.S. Section is also in the process of developing a needs assessment based on participant evaluations from the community health worker trainings in 2015. This needs assessment will be used to identify gaps and develop future capacity-building trainings.

The BHC-U.S. Section and EPA Region VI, in collaboration with other partners, convened a Children's Health Symposium on August 25, 2016, in Brownsville, Texas, modeled after the previous two held in El Paso, Texas and San Diego, California. The event in Brownsville included participation from federal, state, and local partners and community members from the United States and México. Topics included Zika virus updates, asthma and air pollution, and vector borne diseases among other topics.

Two additional binational symposia focused on the intersection of environmental health and vector-borne diseases took place on September 27, 2016 in Mexicali, Baja California, and October 14, 2016 in Nogales, Sonora.

***Healthy People (HP) 2020**

The BHC-U.S. Section participates in the HP 2020 Federal Interagency Work Group in support of the coordination of agency activities as well as reviews and provides input on the progress of HP 2020 objectives.

The BHC-U.S. Section assisted in reviewing the *HP 2020 Midcourse Review: Chapter, Topic Area Overview, and National Snapshots* and submitted feedback in August.

Updates: The BHC-U.S. Section continues to participate in monthly meetings that currently address objective revisions and the planning for Healthy Border 2030.

***Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA)**

The BHC U.S. Section works in collaboration with HRSA and the National Rural Health Association (NRHA) to implement the Border Health Initiative, which aims to identify important border health issues and to develop meetings, training materials, publications and technical assistance and expertise to provide rural health professionals information on access to quality primary health care and safety net providers.

Updates: The BHC-U.S. Section participated in the Border Health Initiative annual meeting in June 2016, in Washington, D.C., that convened state partners and other stakeholders. Updates were provided by each state and the BHC and current activities and there was discussion on future collaborations.

HRSA is re-convening its quarterly teleconferences with the regional commissions that includes the BHC, Delta Regional Authority, Denali Commission, and Appalachian Regional Commission. The first teleconference served as an introductory meeting in which participants provided an overview of their current activities. Follow-up meetings are in the process of being planned.

HRSA-supported HIV/AIDS capacity-building trainings are in the planning stages as part of a collaboration with the BHC and the AIDS Education Training Centers (AETC). They are taking place as scheduled in late 2016/early 2017.

***Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP)**

The BHC U.S. Section maintains a standing collaboration with ONDCP to address substance use and mental health issues along the border through its Southwest Counternarcotics Strategy, which aims to identify approaches in which different federal sectors can work together to prevent and address substance abuse issues.

The BHC U.S. Section provided input to the 2015 Southwest Counternarcotics Strategy. This iteration highlights collaborations, best practices, and models that agencies in collaboration with community organizations have successfully implemented to serve as models other agencies can adapt and implement in their local communities.

Updates: No updates at this time.

***National Cancer Institute (NCI)/ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)**

The BHC is in the process of identifying mechanisms to coordinate the implementation of the following projects in collaboration with NCI and CDC:

- AMIGAS cancer awareness project
- Cancer prevention trainings for promotores
- Tobacco prevention workshop
- Non-communicable disease curriculum

Each of these projects are in different phases of development and implementation and require further discussion to assess what is feasible for each agency.

Updates: No updates at this time.

***Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ)**

The BHC and AHRQ established a partnership in 2014 with AHRQ's participation at the BHC-U.S. Section annual meeting. This partnership is focused on data collection and reporting for the border region in order to provide a comprehensive profile of the health status of border communities that can be used by stakeholders to develop and implement public health programs and policies. This partnership has included the following actions to date:

- Identified AHRQ staff to participate on the BHC's Border Health Research Expert Panel as an ex-officio member beginning in 2015.
- Published the *Chartbook on Health Care for Hispanics* in 2015, as a collaborative effort with other HHS Operating Divisions. The chartbook can be accessed at <http://www.ahrq.gov/research/findings/nhqrd/2014chartbooks/hispanichealth/index.html>.
- Provided feedback on AHRQ's Healthcare Cost and Utilization Project (HCUP), an online federal source for community hospital statistics in 2015.
- Participated in AHRQ's 2015 Research Conference: *Producing Evidence and Engaging Partners to Improve Health Care*.
- Initiated a collaborative effort with AHRQ and the Paso del Norte Institute for Healthy Living to begin data collection for the border region utilizing a mobile application designed for promotores. This effort is currently in the initial stages.

Updates: No updates at this time.

***HHS Border Health Intra-agency Group**

The BHC, in coordination with the HHS Office of Global Health Affairs (OGA), is in the process of establishing an HHS Border Health Intra-agency Group composed of HHS Operating Divisions and other partners that have a vested interest in U.S.-México border health issues. Objectives include identifying priorities in the border region; current activities, programs, and initiatives; best practices and how to advance common interests. The BHC's Healthy Border 2020 initiative, in coordination with HHS priorities, will be the framework to identify priorities and guide strategies and actions to address border health challenges.

Updates: The work group convened in September 2016 as part of the BHC-U.S. Section annual meeting to identify agency priorities and activities in the border region and discuss collaborative opportunities. A follow-up conference called took place on November 2017. From these, new collaboration efforts have begun with HRSA, focusing on data and community.

OTHER COLLABORATIONS

***U.S. Border Promotores de Salud Initiative**

The BHC U.S. Section developed this initiative to establish a regional network of community health workers, known as *promotores* along the U.S.-México border, that supports BHC strategic objectives as well as those of HHS' *Foster a 21st Century Health Workforce*. The BHC aims to establish a communication and information platform for *promotores* along the U.S.-México border and initiate training opportunities in support of developing a regional workforce to better serve the needs of border communities.

The initial steps in establishing this initiative consisted of convening an Executive Committee composed of BHC members and leading *promotores* representing the 15 major U.S. border cities to initiate discussions and next steps regarding state *promotores* certification requirements and communication network planning.

Updates: No updates at this time.

***Mental Health and Substance Abuse Training**

In collaboration with the U.S. Office of National Drug Control Policy and the Pan American Health Organization, the BHC coordinated a series of *Train-the-Trainers* events for *promotores* in 10 border cities. In addition, a web-based training was held over a three-day period in Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas. The training was based on the *Mental Health Gap Action Program (mhGAP) Intervention Guide* for mental, neurological, and substance use disorders in non-specialized health settings developed by the World Health Organization and adapted by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

With a focus on community and substance use disorders in non-specialized health settings, this training series provided more than 200 community health workers with basic training in mental health screenings and referrals as well as guidance on ways to monitor individuals with mental illness.

Updates: The BHC-U.S. Section is continuing to coordinate follow-up webinars with PAHO. Six webinars were conducted throughout 2016.

As a result of the initial face-to-face trainings with *promotores*, the BHC and PAHO planned a similar training for physicians and health care providers. The first one took place September 23-24, 2016, in El

Paso, Texas. The National Hispanic Medical Association (NHMA) assisted with identifying physicians from the border region to participate.

***Binational Health Councils (COBINAS)**

The BHC actively collaborates with regional binational health councils, known as COBINAS along the border, to coordinate year-round binational and community-based activities developed to engage border populations through targeted outreach and education campaigns. Approximately 15 binational health councils stretch along the border region, to include associated binational sister-cities and two Native-American tribes. They are critical to the BHC because they form an essential framework for acting on binational health issues and priorities by positioning themselves as the local and regional voices for public health.

The BHC U.S. Section staff attends and participates in COBINA meetings in person or via teleconference as they are scheduled.

Updates: No updates at this time.

U.S.-MÉXICO BINATIONAL STRATEGIC VISIONING

The BHC convened its first-ever binational strategic visioning session in April 2014. Commission members and delegates from the 10 border states, as well as other U.S.-México federal representatives, met to discuss the current status of the Commission and identify future directions that included developing of a strategic map and defining next steps moving forward.

The BHC utilized its binational annual meeting in June 2015 as a forum to discuss strategic visioning updates and to develop an implementation plan.

The Commission convened a Plenary Session on January 25-26, 2016 and determined the work plans, including deliverables and timelines, developed by the Communications, Business, Evaluation, and Priority Alignment Work Groups required review and updating. BHC leadership met in February 2016 to accomplish this and identified completed actions and deliverables, those that could be combined, those in progress, and those that no longer apply. The Communications Work Plan is currently a priority and both Sections are working to complete several deliverables, including communications protocols.

Updates: BHC staff from both sections continue to work on the action items identified in the work plans.

In regards to the communications work plan, an updated registry was developed to better identify the BHC's audience and to date there are over 350 subscribers from both sides of the border. They represent government, health care, elected officials, universities, and community health workers. The registry continues to be distributed to increase the audience and visibility of BHC activities.

Using this registry list as an initial database, an updated online newsletter was published in June 2016. Per the communications work plan, this will be a monthly newsletter that includes updates from BHC leadership and includes articles on borderwide activities.

Other items including developing a binational presentation are still in progress.

The business and evaluation work plans were addressed during the BHC-U.S. Section annual meeting in September 2016 and the binational annual meeting in Tijuana last October 2016.