

Tompkins County Board of Health
Tuesday, May 26, 2026
12 Noon, Rice Conference Room and MS Teams

Present: Dr. Melissa Dhundale, Dr. Andreia de Lima; Frank Cantone; Christy Bianconi.

Staff: Jennie Sutcliffe, Rachel Buckwalter, Skip Parr, Jessica Clark Mandeville, Zoe Lincoln, Sagarika Vemprala, Doug Barnes, Brenda Grinnell-Crosby, Samantha Hillson

Guests: None

Call to Order: Dr. Melissa Dhundale called the regular meeting of the Board of Health (BOH) to order at 12:18 p.m.

Privilege of the Floor: No comments were received.

Approval of Previous BOH Minutes: Approval of the previous BOH minutes was postponed due to lack of quorum. Approval will be scheduled for the next meeting.

NEW BUSINESS

Fee Schedule Review and Proposed Changes

Mr. Parr reviewed proposed changes to the Environmental Health fee schedule. No action was taken due to lack of quorum, and voting was postponed to the next meeting.

- On-site wastewater systems: proposed change to the permit application or renewal fee for replacement systems from \$80 to \$50 to align with other renewal permit fees.
- Late and expedited fees: proposed to “flip” the current amounts, changing the expedited fee to \$75 and the late fee to \$50 to better reflect the urgency of expedited requests.
- Program revenue analysis: Environmental Health reviews revenue compared to program costs and generally aims for approximately a 20% margin. Most programs are close to this target, with mass gatherings identified as an exception that has required fee increases over time.
- 2027 fees: based on current figures, no general fee increases were recommended for 2027.

FOCUS TOPIC

Oral Health Program Proposal and Community Survey Findings

Sagarika and Ms. Buckwalter presented an overview of oral health access work completed over the past several years, including community survey findings, qualitative interviews conducted in partnership

with Cornell University, a review of existing resources, and a proposed mobile dental hygienist model for Tompkins County.

- Survey findings: 58% of surveyed children had a dental visit within the past 6 months, 24% had a visit between 6 months and 1 year, and 18% had a visit more than 1 year ago.
- Access barriers: approximately 43% of surveyed families reported traveling outside Tompkins County for dental care, most commonly to Binghamton. Families described barriers including scheduling, insurance, transportation, financial stress, and the burden of taking time off work.
- Community response: parents interviewed were generally supportive of a mobile or portable dental care model, noting that it could reduce travel and other access burdens.
- Existing resources: two dental offices in Tompkins County currently accept Medicaid, and Finger Lakes Community Health provides school-based dental services in some districts, including Groton, Newfield, Trumansburg, and TST BOCES.
- Neighboring model: Tioga County's Tioga Smiles mobile dental program began in 2003 and has expanded over time. In 2024, the program reported 1,227 dental exams, 548 sealants, and 325 new dental clients. The presenters noted that some service counts may overlap.
- Program comparison: Tioga Smiles reported 2024 total expenses of approximately \$248,000, including a county share of approximately \$115,000 and revenue of approximately \$133,000. Finger Lakes Community Health budget information for its mobile/school-based model was not yet available.
- Proposed model: the team proposed a mobile dental hygienist model focused on children ages 1-18 who do not receive adequate preventive dental care at home or from a dental professional. Potential services include dental exams, cleanings, preventive services, oral health education, and referral coordination.

BOARD DISCUSSION AND FEEDBACK

- Members discussed whether a lower-cost portable model could be launched before investing in a full mobile dental van. Ms. Buckwalter described the possibility of beginning with a hygienist, portable equipment, and a vehicle such as a hatchback, then scaling up if the model succeeds.
- Dr. Dhundale offered to connect the team with mobile van vendors that may help identify grant opportunities.
- Dr. de Lima noted that the potential FQHC partnership with Cayuga is currently on hold and should not be relied on in the near term.
- Mr. Cantone emphasized the importance of oral hygiene education, diet education, and parent communication. Members discussed possible collaboration with school nurses and PTAs, as well as sending children home with toothbrushes and dental education materials.
- Members discussed long waits for dental appointments. The presenters reported that some families described waits of approximately 6-9 months or longer, including for Medicaid-accepting and pediatric dental providers outside the county.
- The Board discussed the need for referral support and case management when a child is identified through the mobile model as needing additional or urgent dental care.

- Members discussed the lack of current countywide dental data. Potential data sources identified included school medical history forms, school physicals, Medicaid emergency department admissions data, and local primary care provider diagnosis data related to dental pain or cavities.
- Members discussed the relationship between dental problems and missed school time. The presenters noted that local quantitative data are limited, but qualitative findings and broader research indicate that dental pain and infection can affect attendance and concentration.

NEXT STEPS

- Develop a more formal business plan for the proposed mobile dental hygienist model, including staffing, hours, equipment costs, maintenance, referral coordination, and the number of schools to be served.
- Continue identifying grants and other funding sources for startup equipment and ongoing operational costs, recognizing that some county share may be needed.
- Gather additional data from Medicaid emergency department admissions, local primary care providers, and school-based forms or exams to better define the need and potential impact.
- Share follow-up requests with Board members, including potential data questions for schools and local providers.

MONTHLY REPORTS

Division of Family and Child Health Report

Ms. Clark Manderville had nothing to add to her written report included in the packet.

Medical Director's Report

Dr. Klepack was not present. Ms. Sutcliffe noted that the department had issued a press release regarding hantavirus to address misinformation and local concern, emphasizing that risk is low for Tompkins County residents. Members also briefly discussed Ebola communications and preparedness materials.

Commissioner's Report

Ms. Sutcliffe highlighted May as Mental Health Awareness Month and shared examples of Whole Health efforts to expand mental health services beyond brick-and-mortar settings.

- Mental health clinicians have been facilitating off-site wellness groups at Titus Towers on topics such as boundaries, coping tools, grief, and communication skills.
- The department is exploring expansion to Ellis Hollow Apartments and broader collaboration around older adult services, including a quarterly internal work group and coordination with the County Office for the Aging.

- Psychiatric nurse practitioners and mental health nurses have also been providing services through home visits and in supportive housing settings.

Division of Community Health Report

Ms. Buckwalter reported no major updates beyond the oral health presentation and previously noted communicable disease updates.

Office of Communications and Engagement Report

Ms. Hillson had no additional contributions.

Environmental Health Report

Mr. Parr reported that Environmental Health enforcement activities have kept the team busy. He also shared that he had recently attended a conference for Environmental Health Directors and introduced Environmental Health staff in attendance, including Doug Barnes, Senior Environmental Health Specialist, who supervises the ATUPA program. Enforcement items were not reached during the recorded public session.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

A motion was made by Dr. Andreia de Lima and seconded by Christy Bianconi to move into executive session. The Board moved into executive session at approximately 1:15 p.m. **The executive session was not recorded.**

Adjournment: Meeting was adjourned following executive session.

Next Meeting: The next meeting date will be June 23rd, 2026.