

Date: August 25, 2020
To: State Board of Health Members
From: Kevin Dick
Washoe County District Health Officer
Subject: September 2020 Washoe County District Health Officer Report

COVID-19

The Health District and the Regional Incident Management Team continue with the COVID-19 response. The Governor has established a County Tracking system that requires weekly Assessments and Action Plans from Counties that exceed the tracking thresholds. The County tracking approach, threshold measures for elevated disease transmission, and county level implementation and actions related to the severity of exposure risk and mitigation levels are described in the State's *Road to Recovery: Moving to a New Normal* plan which was issued on August.

Washoe County exceeds the thresholds of 200 for new cases of COVID-19 per 100,000 population over a thirty-day period, and testing positivity rate of over 7%, which places the County in the Moderate Risk Level. Based on this risk level the County is in the State's assessment process and responsible for completing a local risk assessment and action plan for consideration by the State Task Force.

The Health District worked with the Washoe County School District (WCSD), charter and private schools to provide technical assistance with school reopening plans. The Health District also collaborated with the WCSD to develop an Outbreak Response Plan for Schools. The WCSD reopening scheduled for August 17 was postponed due to the smoke impacts of the Loyalton Fire with a total of three days of school cancelled the first week.

The Point of Screening and Testing (POST) site is currently operating five days per week and is open for testing of symptomatic and asymptomatic people. Charles River Labs (CLR) began receiving specimens from the POST on August 18. The plan is to have CRL conducting the testing for the POST two days per week to manage the capacity of the CRL lab for good turn-around times and reduce throughput to help reduce turn-around times at the Nevada State Public Health Lab. 8,229 COVID-19 tests were conducted at the POST in July.

Ten Intermittent Hourly Registered Nurses were hired to conduct COVID testing at the POST. As part of the continuing operations for the Point of Screening and Testing (POST), the PHP program has on-boarded and trained 20 new staff. This staff is primarily being hired through, and in coordination with, the University of Nevada, Reno. In addition, the PHP program will continue to recruit and on-board new Medical Reserve Corps (MRC) volunteers. CERT volunteers and National Guard troops and medics also continue to provide support to POST activities.

Currently there are 67 disease investigators on staff, with approximately 30 working on any given day through a seven-day week. Forty-two staff has been brought on board through the UNR Nevada Public Health Training Center. We are currently working with UNR to add 10 additional disease investigation staff by September 15

to reduce the backlog in case investigations currently experienced. Calling of case contacts identified through investigations has been handed off to Deloitte contact tracers through the State contract.

The National Guard staffing resumed operations with the Health District response on August 10. The Health District continues to work with UNR to recruit additional staff for disease investigation and call center operations to maintain testing capacity and reduce the time required to conduct disease investigations following receipt of positive COVID-19 test results.

National Immunization Awareness Month



August is National Immunization Awareness month (NIAM). This annual observance highlights the efforts of healthcare professionals to protect patients of all ages against vaccine-preventable diseases through on-time vaccination. The CDC is providing resources to assist in communicating to healthcare professionals, parents, and patients about immunization during August and throughout the year at <https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/events/niam/index.html>

Maintaining routine vaccination is essential during the COVID-19 pandemic to protect individuals and communities from vaccine-preventable diseases. Routine vaccination prevents illnesses which can lead to additional medical visits, hospitalizations, and additional strain on the healthcare system. The Immunization Program continues to provide on-site clinical services five days a week during the COVID-19 pandemic with safety procedures in place for staff and clients.

Immunization Program staff have been an integral part of the COVID-19 response since the beginning of the pandemic in March, assisting with COVID-19 testing at the POST, helping with POST related paperwork as well as continuing to provide services in the Immunization clinic and working on grant related activities. Staff have returned to their regular duties since June but continue to assist with COVID-19 testing as needed.

Data for FY19 demonstrates progress toward reaching statewide and national immunization goals. A total of 3,090 people (2,299 children & 791 adults) were served and 9,920 vaccine doses were administered during FY19 onsite and offsite clinics. An assessment of vaccination coverage for 2019 showed that 75.8% of children aged 19-35 months had received age-appropriate vaccinations at the time of their visits to clinics or healthcare providers located in Washoe County. The Healthy People 2020 objective is 80% for children aged 19 to 35 months to have received the recommended doses of the childhood vaccines DTaP, polio, MMR, Hib, hepatitis B, varicella and pneumococcal conjugate.

Year	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Rate (%)	73.6	74.2	75.6	79.0	77.1	76.2	75.6	75.8

Table 1: Washoe County 19-35-month-old Immunization Rate (4 DTaP, 3 polio, 1 MMR, 3 Hib, 3 Hep B, 1 varicella, 4 PCV)
 Data source: NV WebIZ replica database, State of Nevada, 3/2/2020

Human Papillomavirus (HPV) vaccination rates for 2019 remain steady but continue to be well below the Healthy People 2020 objective of 80%. Nevada WebIZ statewide data shows only 18.6 percent of adolescents age 13-17 years old received the complete series of HPV, with a 22.6 percent 3 dose completion rate in Washoe County. It is important to note that the CDC Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) updated the recommendations for HPV to a 2-dose schedule in December 2016 for girls and boys who initiate the vaccination series at ages 9 through 14 years. The three-dose series remain recommended for persons who initiate the vaccination series at ages 15 through 26 years and for immunocompromised persons. The rate for the 3 doses series will continue to decrease as teens complete the 2-dose series for HPV.

Nevada State Immunization Program, percent appropriately vaccinated, 13-17 years old

HPV rates

	2017 Washoe County			2017 Nevada			2018 Washoe County			2018 Nevada			2019 Washoe County			2019 Nevada		
	F	M	Both	F	M	Both	F	M	Both	F	M	Both	F	M	Both	F	M	Both
1 Dose	58.1	54.1	56.0	50.7	45.2	47.8	61.2	58.9	60	58.1	53.9	55.9	60.7	59.0	59.8	56.2	53.6	54.8
2 Doses	45.7	40.6	43.1	37.4	31.5	34.4	48.1	44.2	46.1	43.9	38.8	41.3	46.7	44.2	45.4	42.2	38.5	40.3
3 Doses	34.1	29.3	31.6	26.1	20.7	23.3	31.2	27.3	29.2	26.6	22.1	24.3	24.1	21.3	22.6	20.1	17.1	18.6

Data source: NV Web IZ, 7/29/2020

Offsite clinics have provided immunizations to vulnerable populations to ensure access to immunizations through partnerships with multiple community agencies.

Immunization Program Offsite Clinic Activities – July 1, 2019 to June 30, 2020				
# of Clinics	# of Children Served	# of Adults Served	# Vaccine Doses Administered	Collaborating Agencies
Back to School Clinics				
2	202	0	643	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Immunize Nevada Truckee Meadows Healthy Communities-Family Health Committee
Flu Clinics				
3	208	161	369	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Northern Nevada Children's Cancer Foundation Nevada Discovery Museum Mariposa Academy Washoe County School District Immunize Nevada Nevada State Immunization Program
Flu Clinics targeting low income/high risk adults				

2	11	53	133	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Salvation Army • Mexican Consulate • Immunize Nevada • Walmart
Point of Dispensing (PODs) Clinics for mass flu immunization exercise				
2	120	337	457	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Washoe County EPHP • Catholic Charities • Washoe County School District • Truckee Meadows Healthy Communities-Family Health Committee • Project Homeless Connect • Community Emergency Response Team (CERT)
Immunization clinic for 2-18 years and flu only for adults 19 years and up				
1	39	5	113	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Truckee Meadows Healthy Communities-Family Health Committee • Boys and Girls Club
Total Offsite Clinics	Total # of Children Served	Total # of Adults Served	Total # of Vaccine doses Administered	In partnership with multiple community agencies
10	580	556	1,715	

The School Located Vaccination Clinic (SLVC) program provided flu shots for children attending Title I schools. This program was held as a collaboration with Immunize Nevada and the Washoe County School District.

School Located Vaccination Clinics 2016-2017 through 2019-2020 Flu Seasons

Flu Season	# of School Located Vaccination Clinics	IIV4 (Injectable)	Total Doses	Children	Adults	Total Served
2016-17	15	1,047	1,047	869	178	1,047
2017-18	17	1,089	1,089	963	126	1,089
2018-19	20	1,427	1,427	1,170	257	1,427
2019-20	17	1,210	1,210	975	235	1,210

Immunization Program staff are also responsible for carrying out a variety of grant related activities such as relocating vaccines to reduce vaccine wastage, conducting Vaccine For Children (VFC) provider visits to enhance stewardship and accountability for publicly purchased vaccines as well as with VFC providers to implement provider-level quality improvement (QI) strategies to help increase vaccine uptake by improving and enhancing immunization workflow. Perinatal hepatitis B surveillance and follow-up is another grant component that is carried out by the Epidemiology program.

Immunization staff will be participating in four Back-To-School events in August (8/1, 8/8, 8/15, 8/22) in collaboration with Immunize Nevada, Boys and Girls Club, Family Health Festival, Food Bank Mobile Harvest and the Reno Sparks Convention Center.

Robust community partnerships are essential to carrying out the goal of increasing immunization rates in Washoe County. These collaborations are useful to reach vulnerable populations for recommended vaccinations as well as prepare the community for delivering new vaccinations as they become available.

Sexual Health (Outreach and Disease Investigation) – Data for 2019 reported STD and HIV cases was reported last month. Staff have been working on disease investigations while also working in the COVID response. Although less testing is being conducted in the community due to limitations with providers and access to services, including community site testing, STDs and HIV infections are still occurring.

People who test late in their course of HIV disease have more negative health outcomes and contribute more toward HIV transmissions than people living with HIV that are in care and compliant with their treatment. Of the seven (7) Stage 3 HIV (formerly known as AIDS) cases reported, five (5) were newly diagnosed with HIV and Stage 3 HIV Infection at the same time. This indicates that people tested late into their infection, likely at least 10 years after acquiring HIV. These cases are often discovered when a person presents for medical care due to experiencing a remarkable decrease in their immune systems ability to fight off other infections. Opportunities are for testing are often missed due to lack of access to services, stigma regarding HIV, denial about personal risk and lack of universal testing offered by community providers.

Also of note, five (5) congenital syphilis cases were reported for 2019. For the first half of 2020, four (4) cases have already been reported. STD disease investigations have been prioritized to address syphilis, with the highest priority of preventing congenital syphilis infections. Partner Services (contact tracing) has been discontinued for chlamydia and gonorrhea to focus on syphilis cases. Treatment is verified to each chlamydia and gonorrhea case reported to WCHD. Clients are asked to inform their partners and refer them for testing.

Comparison of Reportable STDs and HIV, Stage 3 HIV Mid-Year 2020 vs. Mid-Year 2019						
	Chlamydia	Gonorrhea	Primary & Secondary Syphilis	Congenital Syphilis	HIV	Stage 3 HIV (formerly known as AIDS)
Jan–June 2020	1205	521	63	4	19	7
Jan–June 2019	1438	361	78	3	23	4
% difference	-16%	44%	-19%	33%	-17%	75%

Tuberculosis Prevention and Control Program – Staff are currently following two cases of active pulmonary tuberculosis. The program has seen a reduction in the number of B1 immigrants related to travel restrictions; however, the cases that have been seen have all completed the evaluation within 90 days. Angela Penny attended a meeting with the Nevada Division of Public and Behavioral Health on August 11, 2020 to review the annual performance measures for the tuberculosis program.

Reproductive and Sexual Health Services – APRN and RN staff attended the 2020 Virtual National Reproductive Health Conference August 11th and 12th. Staff attended the “Implementing the 2019 ASCCP Risk

Based Management Guidelines for Abnormal Cervical Cancer Screening Tests in Your Practice” webinar and are working to update clinic policies and procedures to reflect the new guidelines.

Residents from Dr. West, Dr. Williams, Dr. Zell and APRN students started rotations in Family Planning clinic in July. Staff continue to await the opening of the Washoe County Sheriff’s Office in order to provide Reproductive Services to the female inmate population. An agreement was finalized between WCHD and Washoe County Human Service Agency to provide reproductive health services and immunizations services for guests at the Our Place Family and Women’s Shelter. Staff will begin providing services this month.

Chronic Disease Prevention Program (CDPP) – Three of the four full time staff are committed to the COVID-19 response between 24 and 32 hours a week as disease investigators. Staff are busy updating workplans and budgets for multiple grants included PHHS, SNAP-ed, and Tobacco.

Maternal, Child and Adolescent Health (MCAH) – Mothers continue to receive safe sleep training and portable cribs individually throughout COVID-19 response from the Cribs for Kids program.

Fetal Infant Mortality Review (FIMR) nurses continue to hold meetings virtually and attend related meetings virtually. Nursing staff are also preparing for yearend report using the National Center for Fatality Review & Prevention Case Reporting System which was activated July 1, 2019.

Women, Infants and Children (WIC) – The USDA has extended waivers through September 2020. These waivers allow staff to provide services to clients without the requirements of physical presence, allows for remote benefit issuance, and eliminates the need for updated medical documentation.

The State of Nevada has allocated over \$3 million dollars for WIC food delivery. In order to maximize resources, the WCHD WIC offices are collaborating with Catholic Charities to provide the delivery services. Nevada is one of the only states in the nation offering this service to our vulnerable population. Delivery is anticipated to begin in early September.

Food/Food Safety

- The Food Safety Program is currently promoting our new “Excellence in Food Safety” Award (Award). The Award program was created to recognize Washoe County food facilities that go above and beyond to demonstrate their commitment to long-term food safety. Participating in the program will not only help facilities to better publicize their food safety record, it can also be used as a working goal to encourage employee teambuilding and awareness of food safety practices in the workplace. The media campaign promoting this is currently running and includes advertisements on websites, digital billboards and radio. The food safety team will begin accepting applications in January 2021. More information can be found on our website - <https://www.washoecounty.us/health/programs-and-services/environmental-health/food-protection-services/Excellence-In-Food-safety.php>

Commercial Plans

- As previously reported, Commercial Plans numbers have seen a reduction when compared to 2019 levels. That being noted, overall numbers remained relatively similar to 2018 levels and monthly totals have been fairly stable from January through June as approximately 90-100 plans per month have been reviewed. However, July experienced a significant drop to 67 plan reviews as the first

monthly outlier of the year. The monthly inspection average for January through June was approximately 30 inspections per month, while July exceeded this average with a total of 36 inspections conducted during the month. Both Reno and Sparks Building Departments have been consulted regarding their incoming plan levels. Both noted slight decreases in commercial plans, but also significant increases in residential plans. Both agencies indicated that their overall plan levels remain higher than normal. The Commercial Plans team continues to operate with reduced staff as multiple team members continue assignments with the COVID-19 response.

Community Development	JAN 2020	FEB 2020	MAR 2020	APR 2020	MAY 2020	JUN 2020	JUL 2020	2020 YTD	2019 TOTAL
Development Reviews	22	33	38	37	29	40	18	217	373
Commercial Plans Received	97	90	117	88	94	95	67	648	1,325
Commercial Plan Inspections	33	30	38	20	35	25	36	217	395
Water Projects Received	9	5	3	2	3	7	5	34	87
Lots/Units Approved for Construction	158	108	85	68	184	209	0	812	1,337

Permitted Facilities

- Child Care – Inspections continue to keep on pace with licensing requirements and EHS staff is headed into a busy season in the fall with most licenses due September through October. Staff from EHS is also working with WCHD Epidemiology and Human Services Agency (HSA) staff to develop protocols for COVID-19 response in Child Care Facilities as more children are expected in these facilities once the school year starts.
- Pools/Spas/Aquatic – Most pools that decided to open starting in COVID-19 Phase 1 Reopening Roadmap to Recovery have been inspected. EHS staff has conducted more than 200 pool inspections. Staff is now concentrating on ensuring that pools that are closed have done so safely. Public spas in Washoe County remain closed due to COVID-19.
- Schools – Staff from EHS completed a series of meetings and the final version of the first comprehensive Outbreak Response Plan with the Washoe County School District (WCSD) was released. The plan includes a significant amount of direction specific to COVID-19, however, it also includes response information for Norovirus, Influenza and Pertussis outbreaks. Additionally, staff assisted the WCSD as part of their Task Force Committee for their Re-Opening Plan. The plan released August 10, 2020, states the WCSD is opening in varying capacities on August 17.
- Training – Another EHS staff member successfully completed the REHS exam on his first attempt. This keeps the rate at 100% pass on first try for all employees who have gone through the REHS formal training program since it started in 2016. Along with the nine who have successfully completed the program and passed the exam, there are currently two who have recently completed the training program and three who are in training. All five of these employees are planning to take the REHS exam within the next 18 months.

Land Development

- Septic plan intake remains down around 35% year over year. Well plan intake is up 94%.
- Plan review times remain at two weeks with elevated inspection counts but will be reduced over the course of August.

Land Development	JAN 2020	FEB 2020	MAR 2020	APR 2020	MAY 2020	JUN 2020	JUL 2020	2020 YTD	2019 TOTAL
Plans Received (Residential/Septic)	53	58	43	45	37	54	53	343	913
Residential Septic/Well Inspections	72	99	102	76	77	87	86	599	1,051
Well Permits	10	14	7	14	14	11	12	82	72

Safe Drinking Water (SDW)

- The 3rd quarter report was issued to the State and all basic functions in the program remain caught up except sanitary surveys. Currently, approximately 35% of the surveys for the year remain completed, leaving 65% to complete with only 40% of the year remaining.
- The largest survey for Truckee Meadows Water Authority (TMWA) has been scheduled. Incline Village and Sun Valley General Improvement District (SVGID) will be the two largest remaining after that. It is expected that by the end of September, the program will be able to complete those and work through several of the smaller systems. The target is to finish another third of the systems by the end of September.

Vector-Borne Diseases (VBD)

- Helicopter aerial larvicide treatment is scheduled for August 19, 2020. No West Nile virus positive mosquito pools have been detected.
- Program staff investigated seven bat collection/exposures, five resulted in positive rabies test results or unsatisfactory for testing, two were negative. One cat was placed into a four-month home quarantine following unsatisfactory testing for rabies results. Four animals received post exposure rabies vaccination boosters. Three residents have also begun rabies post exposure prophylaxis.

Service Requests	JAN 2020	FEB 2020	MAR 2020	APR 2020	MAY 2020	JUN 2020	JUL 2020	2020 YTD
Tick Identifications	4	2	0	0	3	4	1	14
Rabies (Bat testing)	1	1	0	0	3	9	7	21
Mosquito Fish Requests	2	1	0	0	3	5	2	13

Inter-Hospital Coordinating Council

The Inter-Hospital Coordinating Council (IHCC) members have begun scheduling and holding meetings for plan revisions, workgroups, and the first COVID-19 after action report. Discussions for upcoming trainings and the use of COVID-19 grant funds for PPE have been held. The group approved the purchase of 25% of funds on n95 masks, 5% on fit test kits and the remainder split 35% each face coverings and gowns.

2150 COVID-19 testing kits were provided to 6 healthcare/EMS/Fire partners, as requested, to help in the COVID-19 response.

Emergency Medical Service (EMS)

EMS staff responded to the Multi-Casualty Incident that occurred July 20, filling the Medical Services Unit role at the Health District. An After-Action review was conducted with participating agencies and facilities. Multiple lessons were learned, even though it was a small event.

The first Mutual Aid Evacuation Agreement (MAEA) revisions workgroup was held August 7. The MAEA is updated on a biennial basis and revisions will be complete at the end of fiscal year 2020.

EMS Statistician, Ms. Gunawan, presented the Fiscal Year 2020 Mid-Year Data Report draft to the EMSAB board meeting on August 6, 2020. The motion was approved by the board. The final draft will be presented to the DBOH board.

Government Affairs Update

The 32nd Special Session started Friday, July 31, 2020, and concluded on August 6, 2020. This was the second special session in less than two weeks called to address the policy concerns mainly related to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Governor's proclamation outlined the specified items that were considered.

- Criminal and social justice policy reform
- Worker, business, safety and liability protections
- Voting modifications for the upcoming elections in November
- Unemployment benefits
- Rental dispute resolutions
- Items related to the Legislative Branch

SB4 was the only bill to directly impact the Washoe and Southern Nevada Health Districts. The bill took effect on August 11, 2020. SB4 grants certain businesses in Nevada protections against liabilities if they have adopted and adhered to practicing safe protocols to reduce and prevent the spread of COVID-19. This act expires by limitation on the later of the date on which the Governor terminates the emergency described in the Declaration of Emergency for COVID-19 issued on March 12, 2020, or July 1, 2023. SB4 represents a significant impact to the EHS staff resources which have already been stretched by the COVID-19 response.

The bill requires district health departments in a county whose population is 100,000 or more to:

- Advise the Nevada Gaming Control Board (NGCB) concerning public health matters relating to licensed gaming establishments and authorizes the health districts upon request of the NGCB to enforce public health regulations.
- The bill authorizes the Nevada Gaming Control Board to require a facility under its jurisdiction to submit a copy of their response plan to the NGCB and authorizes a health authority to require a public accommodation facility not under the jurisdiction of the NGCB to submit their response plan to the health authority and provides for the confidentiality of those plans.
- Requires the Director of the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) to adopt regulation standards to reduce and prevent the transmission of COVID-19 in public accommodations facilities. The regulations include the standards and frequency of cleaning public accommodations. The bill then requires a district board of health to adopt regulations that are substantively identical to the regulations adopted by DHHS. The bill allows for the DBOH to amend or repeal in a conforming manner within 30 days after the effective date or within 10 days after the adoption of the regulations, whichever is earlier. The adopted regulations apply only during the duration of a declaration of a public health emergency.
- Each public accommodation facility must establish, implement, and maintain a response plan that provides testing and time off for employees who have been exposed to COVID-19 or are experiencing symptoms.
- The health authority may, upon receiving a complaint at any time inspect a facility to ensure compliance. The health authority shall inspect a facility with more than 200 rooms available for sleeping once every three months and each resort hotel at least once every 2 months. The bill sets forth the process to correct the violations and the appeal process.
- Authorizes the Secretary of State to suspend the state business license of a facility that does not comply with controlling health standards and requires the Secretary of State to provide notice of the suspension to the person.

- Washoe County Health District (WCHD) was allocated \$500,000 of CARES funding that must be spent by December 31, 2020. After that, date, this becomes an unfunded mandate. The WCHD submitted a fiscal note of \$742,000 annually.

Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP)

CHIP partners continue to meet to further determine how to best move forward with the strategies and tactics identified under the Behavioral Health, Housing/Homelessness, and Physical Activity and Nutrition focus areas.

Behavioral Health

The State of Nevada received an award for the Crisis Counseling Immediate Services Program through FEMA and is using the funding to address behavioral health needs associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. WCHD has collaborated with WCHSA and the State of Nevada to build out a portion of the program in Washoe County. The program, now titled the Nevada Resilience Project, has placed six full-time Resilience Ambassadors and a supervisor through WCHSA. The team has completed onboarding and training including psychological first aid. In addition, the team is completing basic contact investigation training and is shadowing a WCHD contact investigator to better understand what a person interacting with the Health District may experience.

The first target population for services are individuals who have received a positive test result for COVID-19. Starting the week of August 17, WCHD will provide a secure list of individuals who have received a positive COVID-19 test result to the Washoe County Nevada Resilience Project team. The team will proactively reach out to these individuals to provide support to develop positive coping strategies as well as assistance connecting with any needed community resources. Two additional Ambassadors are also available to the community through the Truckee Meadows Boys and Girls Club.

Psychological First Aid provided by the Ambassadors is designed to reduce the initial distress caused by a traumatic event and to foster short- and long-term adaptive functioning and coping. Psychological First Aid is based on the understanding that individuals affected by traumatic events will experience a wide range of initial reactions that may cause enough distress to interfere with coping. Services may be provided in both individual and group formats and telehealth and other technology-based platforms will be prioritized to minimize risk of possible exposure.

In addition, the program has produced three PSAs focused on individuals who may be feeling overwhelmed and directing them to Crisis Support Services of Nevada. Individuals can call 800-273-8255 or text "Care" to 839-863 to be connected to someone who can provide support and resources.

Truckee Meadows Healthy Communities (TMHC)

The Family Health Festival conducted on August 10th at the Hug High School was very successful serving about 1500 people. The event served double the number of people that we served in 2019. New for this event was the drive through model. Partners successfully conducted screenings and completed applications on site to connect families to basic need assistance.

TMHC continues to implement the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation BUILD Health Challenge Grant, the HELLO Project to create social connections for the elderly and reduce senior suicide rates. The project has been complicated by the COVID-19 pandemic and the importance of physical distancing to

protect this vulnerable population. TMHC has adapted the project to create social connections through digital community and conversations. The virtual community conversations typically begin with a speaker and then a group conversation of the participants. The community conversations are held at noon on Tuesday's and Thursday's using Zoom.

The Hello Project also participated with Artown for the Heartown program. Participating elders were provided with wooden hearts, paints and brushes to create a piece of heart art. The completed works of heart art were collected and are on display on the fence at the Lear theatre and other locations in the community through Labor Day.

More information about the HELLO Project is available at: www.hellostartsnow.org.