

HOUSTON HEALTH DEPARTMENT AND HARRIS COUNTY PUBLIC HEALTH: A STRONGER PARTNERSHIP FOR HEALTHIER COMMUNITIES



The accredited Houston Health Department (HHD) and Harris County Public Health (HCPH) share a long-standing and robust partnership grounded in their common mission to protect and improve the health of communities across the city and county. This collaboration has consistently strengthened public health outcomes through joint initiatives, coordinated services, and shared resources. Together, the two agencies work to address critical health needs, expand access to care, and ensure effective responses to emerging challenges and emergencies.

This history of collaboration is reflected through joint presentations to Houston's City Council and Harris County's Commissioner's Court, regular monthly meetings between agency leaders, and quarterly sessions with both Executive teams. As the new leadership establishes a cadence for Executive Director-to-Executive Director meetings, the agencies remain committed to deepening their coordination. Their enduring partnership highlights a shared responsibility and continuing commitment to safeguarding the well-being of communities across the region.

Local Health Authority Partnership

LHAs have collaborated on all infectious disease concerns, including COVID guidance and vaccination strategy, Mpox communication and vaccination strategy, pediatric immunizations, and Measles outbreak guidance and immunization strategy.

Key Collaborations:

- HCPH and HHD (**Houston Local Response Network**) collaborate to process labs for state reportable diseases.
- **LHAs have jointly developed communication strategies** and public guidance for oropouche, West Nile, and food-borne illnesses.
- LHAs continually advocate for strategies to protect community health, including **immunization recommendations** and heat-related illness awareness.

Communications and Public Affairs

The HHD and HCPH communications units maintain a close and effective partnership to strengthen public health messaging across the region. By working together, the two units ensure that critical information on disease prevention, health promotion, and emergency response is consistent, accessible, and far-reaching. Regular coordination allows both agencies to be unified, and speak with one voice, amplify key updates, and better serve the diverse communities of Houston and Harris County.

Key Collaborations:

- **Amplify urgent public health updates** and alerts through joint communication efforts.
- Ensure residents receive timely, accurate, and cohesive information that supports healthier communities.
- **Coordinate on disease prevention messaging** to reach broad and diverse audiences.
- Develop and share consistent public health messages across both agencies.
- Hold **bi-weekly meetings** with regional health communication partners to align strategies.
- Developed **cobranded templates**

Chronic Disease

HHD's Office of Chronic Disease and Wellness (OCD) works with the Go Healthy Houston Coalition, HCPH, and other partners to advance the Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP). The Coalition meets biannually and partners report updates year-round. This collaboration promotes chronic disease prevention, healthy food access, and health equity while aligning local resources and strengthening partnerships. Our collaborative efforts are guided by the Public Health Accreditation Board (PHAB) standards. HHD and HCPH both maintain prestigious PHAB-accredited status.

Key Collaborations:

- Coordinate efforts across service areas to avoid duplication and maximize complementary roles.
- Collaborated as steering partners in **Healthy Living Matters** (2011–2022) and in strategic planning (2021), shaping childhood obesity prevention and related chronic disease approaches.
- Since 2022, HCPH's Tobacco/Vaping Prevention & Cessation team has been an active member of HHD's **Breathe with Pride: Houston LGBTQ2IA+ Tobacco Prevention & Control Coalition** to extend reach to priority populations
- HHD participates on the **HCPH Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP) Steering Committee**

Maternal and Child Health

Through membership in the HCPH Healthy Start Initiative Consortium, HHD Nursing Services partners with HCPH Community Health and Wellness to strengthen maternal and child health outcomes. The Consortium meets quarterly leverages shared expertise, networks, and outreach to improve community health. HHD supports outreach and referrals for prenatal and postpartum care and other early childhood support into HCPH's Healthy Start program.

Key Collaborations:

- Provide expert advice and feedback based on clinical expertise and community health experience.

- Serve as a **Community Connector** by linking consortium efforts to relevant stakeholders, resources, and community programs.
- Engage in **Outreach and Collaboration** to support joint initiatives that address maternal, child, and family health needs.
- Evaluate **Program Impact** through participation in data review, assessment of effectiveness and recommendations for continuous improvement.
- **Maintain formal referral pathways** for Nurse Family Partnership and link HCPH community health worker efforts with HHD programs (WIC, Farmers Market promotion) to support nutrition and social needs.
- **Shared representation on CityMatCH** and other regional maternal health tables to align strategy and reduce service gaps.

Tuberculosis

HHD and HCPH refer cases and contacts to one another as needed based on the individual's place of residence. However, in situations where clients prefer to receive directly observed therapy (DOT) at their workplace, both agencies coordinate efforts to accommodate and support the client's needs. Longstanding collaboration to reduce TB burden through operational coordination on TB case management and elimination efforts, providing mutual support during high caseloads and staffing shortages.

Key Collaborations:

- Coordinate **cross-jurisdictional case management** with HHD and DSHS to ensure continuity of care and consistent outbreak response.
- Partnered on **public education and World TB Day activities** to raise awareness and engage community partners.
- Share innovations and process improvements (**VDOT/DOT workflows**) and provide reciprocal staff training to enhance patient adherence and program efficiency.

Nursing Services, Clinical Services, Mobile Health, MSCs

HHD Nursing Services and HCPH Community Health and Wellness collaborate in multiple ways, as referenced above. HHD opens Multi-Service Centers (MSCs) to partners such as HCPH to host events and bring services directly to the community.

Key Collaborations:

- **Partner on vaccination efforts** (back-to-school, seasonal influenza, COVID-19 vaccination drives) and coordinate clinical workflows and staffing during mass vaccination events.
- **Integrated Perinatal Hepatitis B case management** with HHD (Sept 2024) to ensure smooth handoffs, maintain continuity across DSHS/HHD/HCPH jurisdictions, and streamline investigations.
- Collaborated on outbreak response and continuity of care (**Mpox, syphilis**) by coordinating testing, vaccination, treatment referrals, and case reporting between agencies.
- Provide **mutual support for nursing staff during emergency events**, ensuring continuity of services.
- HHD hosts **HCPH mobile clinics in our MSC** that do not have clinic services. This brings dental, STI/HIV testing, and vaccinations to more communities.
- **Aligned programming** avoids service overlap and offers complementary clinical and social support at shared multi-service center sites (e.g., Kashmere, Magnolia, Denver Harbor).
- Agencies **coordinate joint community events**, mobile clinics, and health fairs to provide integrated wraparound services (dental, WIC, chronic disease prevention, tobacco cessation).
- **Joint participation in oral health initiatives** (Texas Oral Health Coalition; HHD Project Saving Smiles) extends preventive dental services to school-aged children.

Integrated HIV Prevention and Care Planning

The HHD Bureau of HIV/STI and Viral Hepatitis Prevention, HIV Service Linkage Workers, and our Integrated HIV Prevention and Care Planning help link people diagnosed with HIV to medical care and ancillary support services.

Key Collaborations:

- **Maintain clear, complementary roles:** HHD administers large CDC HIV prevention grants while HCPH administers Ryan White Part A HIV treatment and care funds.
- **HCPH provides funding to HHD to deliver HIV care services,** and both agencies coordinate efforts to ensure prevention and treatment efforts are complementary rather than overlapping.
- **Co-authored and aligned on the EHE Master Plan for Houston/Harris County,** coordinating activities across the four EHE pillars to meet shared goals for diagnosing, treating, preventing, and responding.
- **Implemented joint programs such as Data-to-Care matching** and funded non-medical case management to identify and re-engage people with HIV who are out of care, using matched data and coordinated outreach.
- **Collaborated on clinic-level supports** (Antoine HIV Prevention Clinic coordination, clinic environment improvements such as student art to reduce stigma) and shared service agreements to strengthen local prevention–care linkages.

Environmental Health and Public Health Science and Surveillance

The HHD Environmental Health and Public Health Science and Surveillance divisions collaborate extensively with HCPH Environmental Public Health. Their work centers on data sharing, coordinated investigations, environmental response, and joint advocacy, ensuring more efficient operations and stronger protections for residents across both jurisdictions.

Key Collaborations:

- **Data Sharing:** Agreement enables secure, two-way exchange of notifiable conditions and wastewater surveillance data.
- **Case Investigations:** Collaboration on foodborne illness, illegal vendors, and blood lead testing with outreach.
- **Environmental Response:** Shared monitoring data, coordinated emergency response, and mutual support agreements.
- **Advocacy:** Joint legislative efforts, public comments, and policy support to advance community health protection.
- Handling ~4,000 annual complaints and new establishment **referrals**.
- **Coordinating** on mobile food unit (MFU) tracking, commissary inspections, and ticket sharing.
- Conducting **joint complaint investigations** on shared properties
- Workforce development through **joint staff training initiatives** to align best practices and build capacity.
- **Food Safety Policy collaboration at state and federal levels:**
 - Joint advocacy on food safety and public health legislation.
 - Representation on the Texas Environmental Health Association's Legislative Committee.
 - Active participation in the Conference for Food Protection (CFP).
- **Lead (Pb) abatement collaboration:**
 - Both agencies hold HUD-funded grants.
 - Cooperative referral process between jurisdictions.
 - Recent joint response to elevated blood lead cases at a daycare.

Strategy & Planning

The HCPH Office of Planning & Innovation (OPI), HHD Office of Planning, Accreditation, and Strategic Collaborations for Effectiveness (OPACE) and HHD Office of Program Evaluation and Research for Effectiveness (OPERE) have several ongoing collaborations. HCPH and HHD are currently co-authoring an Access to Health Care Assessment and Report, which aims to show the current availability, need, and gaps in health care across the city and county. This assessment is a requirement for both department's PHAB reaccreditation status and will set the groundwork for future collaborative assessments

and reports. Future opportunities include coordinating development and implementation across other PHAB deliverables, including: Department Strategic Plans, Workforce Development Plans, Performance Management Systems, and Quality Improvement Plans, as well as bi-directional sharing of non-surveillance population health data.

Key Collaboration:

- **Access to Health Care Assessment:** The Houston Health Department (HHD) and Harris County Public Health (HCPH) are conducting a joint assessment of health care access across Houston and Harris County, guided by PHAB Measure 7.1.1.A. This work evaluates the availability of primary care and behavioral health services, identifies service gaps, and supports PHAB reaccreditation while strengthening interagency partnerships.

Project Phases:

- Phase 1 – Work Plan Development (July 2025): Defined tasks, roles, and responsibilities.
- Phase 2 – Data Collection (Aug–Oct 2025): Gathering provider lists, reviewing literature, and addressing gaps with quantitative/qualitative methods.
- Phase 3 – Data Analysis (Oct–Nov 2025): Identifying barriers, service gaps, and emerging needs; developing recommendations.
- Phase 4 – Publication and Closeout (Dec 2025–Jan 2026): Final report publication and promotion; Feb–Mar reserved for contingencies

Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Program

The City of Houston WIC Program and HCPH WIC Program maintain a strong, long-standing partnership. Their collaboration ensures client needs are met seamlessly, resources are shared, and outreach is expanded across communities.

Key Collaborations:

- **Smooth transfer of clients** between agencies.
- Coordinated **outreach and education** efforts.
- Shared management of **breast pump inventory**.

- Joint participation in Harris County's **Wellness on Wheels** mobile events (since Dec. 2024), providing accessible health services and resources.
- HCPH and HHD are currently discussing the best strategy for ensuring **clinical care coverage across both jurisdictions** through the mobile health expansion initiative.
- Both teams are sharing mobile health service types, locations, and calendars to ensure that services are complementary and in alignment with one another.

Epidemiology, Surveillance & Emerging Diseases

HHD and HCPH collaborations in epidemiology, surveillance, and emerging diseases are highlighted during outbreaks, including infectious disease outbreak coordination (i.e. WNV, Zika, Ebola prep, H1N1). During the COVID-19 pandemic, memorable collaborations included a vaccination hub at NRG, testing across the city and county, and the creation of joint online COVID-19 and Mpox dashboards, Mpox surveillance coordination, and hospital and FQHC coordination calls. Many collaborations continue today.

Key Collaborations:

- Monthly calls with HHD Lab and Epidemiology counterparts
- HHD **MOU for infectious disease data** (approved this year)
- **Healthy Communities Framework** – measuring disparities across the county
- **Wastewater** collaboration
- HCPH uses the **HHD lab** for wastewater and quick turnaround lab results
- Measles, Rabies, meningitis and all **disease response coordination**

Community Health & Violence Prevention Services

The HCPH Community Health & Violence Prevention Services Division has collaborated with HHD's Bureau of Youth and Adolescent Health's Violence Prevention Initiatives and My Brother's Keeper in some capacity, but mostly meetings/discussions and information sharing. HHD sponsored food trucks for the 2024 Stop the Violence Prayer Walk & Community Celebration. The teams work closely to align strategies that reduce violence

and strengthen community health. Regular meetings foster coordination, data sharing, and joint planning to maximize regional impact.

Key Collaborations:

- **Monthly meetings** for updates, outcome reviews, and shared planning.
- **Joint participation in major events:**
 - Harris County's Violence Prevention Conference (Aug. 30–31, 2025).
 - HHD's CVI Town Hall Meeting with Urban Bridge Consulting (Aug. 5, 2025).
- **Subcontractor collaboration with Harris County Precinct Department (HCPD):**
 - Urban Bridge access to HCPD's new RISE building.
 - Planning to utilize HCPD's mobile unit for CVI initiatives.
 - Coordinated response to a recent shooting incident, with HHD providing support outside HCPD's target ZIP codes.
- **Shared Learning & Best Practices:** approaches on community-based and school-based violence prevention, strengthening capacity through mutual knowledge sharing.
- **Strategic Planning & Alignment:** Collaboration/co-develop strategies through joint brainstorming sessions and follow-up meetings that maximize collective service delivery across Houston and Harris County. Discussed possible alignment of CHVPS' programming with HHD's youth, adolescent health, and reentry initiatives, ensuring coordinated outreach, engagement, and service pathways.
- **Shared Outcomes & Collective Impact:** Joint focus on tracking outcomes, sharing data, and highlighting progress to strengthen the impact of violence prevention and youth development efforts.

Public Health Preparedness & Response

HCPH collaborates with HHD preparedness staff to ensure public health response plans—such as the Strategic National Stockpile Mass Dispensing Plan, Family Assistance Center Plan, and Community Reception Center Plan—are aligned to guide response efforts. Through active participation in preparedness committees, such as the Mass Care Coalition, the Disaster Access and Functional Needs Workgroup, and the FIFA World Cup Health and Medical committee, we strengthen regional readiness and enhance our ability to respond to public health emergencies.

Key Collaborations:

- **FIFA World Cup:** HHD and HCPH are preparing to collaborate during the FIFA World Cup to provide comprehensive situation reports on disease surveillance (including vector diseases), restaurant inspections and mosquito control. Preparations are also being made to scale collaborative processes if there is a threat during the event.
- **Strategic National Stockpile (SNS) Preparedness:** HCPH collaborates through the Medical Countermeasures (MCM) Workgroup and on an individual basis to develop effective strategies for mass medication dispensing or distribution. This includes coordinating Point of Dispensing (POD) locations—similar to COVID-19 vaccination sites—to ensure medications can be dispensed quickly and equitably across the county during a large-scale emergency.
- **Training and Exercise Coordination:** HCPH partners with the HHD preparedness staff to conduct training and exercise opportunities such as the Houston BioWatch Exercise, the Regional Biological Agent Exercise Series, and the upcoming Administrative Preparedness Workshop. These efforts validate response plans, strengthen department capabilities, and improve coordination across jurisdictions.
- **Program and Grant Alignment:** HCPH coordinates with HHD to align Public Health Emergency Preparedness (PHEP) and Cities Readiness Initiative (CRI) grant deliverables, maximizing federal funding, minimizing duplication of effort, and enhancing our impact across the region. Recent collaboration includes the Regional Jurisdictional Risk Assessment, which identifies potential hazards and prioritizes preparedness initiatives, as well as the Regional Multi-Year Integrated Preparedness Plan, which outlines specific activities to address identified priorities.
- **Response Coordination:** HCPH works closely with HHD to ensure a unified public health response. By sharing situational reports, surveillance data, and public messaging, we enhance awareness, streamline operations, and improve service delivery, as demonstrated by the HHD/HCPH jointly operated Community Vaccination Center at NRG Park, a regional hub for COVID-19 vaccinations.

Mosquito & Vector Control

HCPH Mosquito and Vector Control Division (MVCD) has engaged in a long-term collaboration focused on disease response and communication related to vector-borne diseases (VBD). This partnership has lasted for several decades and involves efforts with the HHD epidemiologists and preparedness professionals to mitigate VBD transmission in our community. For 60 years, the MVCD has been actively involved in investigating and responding via: control measures such as inspections, enhanced surveillance when appropriate, conducting community outreach, vector testing, reservoir surveillance, reservoir testing, larviciding, ULV spray trucks, and adulticiding in reaction to both local and travel-associated cases of VBD when applicable. A more recent initiative includes the response to Zika in 2016-2017 and the development of outreach protocols.

Key Collaborations:

- **Environmental and community health projects**, such as tire recycling (early 2000s) and super neighborhood clean-up initiatives (mid-2000s), MVC coordinated with multiple departments that work with heavy waste, neighborhood environments, and HHD (2007-2009). Some of these efforts were supported through collaborative grants with the goal of pass-through funds to HCPH MVCD. Overall, this is a significant effort that resulted in mosquito habitat abatement/reduction.
- **Supporting surveillance efforts** are underway between the MVC team, animal control, and the Houston Fire Department (HFD). This partnership aims to evaluate and intervene in vector-borne diseases with assistance from BARC/Animal Control. The goal is to identify diseases and vectors in animals brought in from various areas of the City of Houston (CoH). Additionally, we have historically coordinated with HFD for thermal fogging of storm sewers to control mosquito populations and provide a secure location for vector surveillance activities.
- Both MVC and HHD **laboratories** have collaborated to improve molecular diagnostic testing and biosafety since 2023. As MVC has in-house confirmation of VBD for the community, we have included CoH leaders in communicating positive test results. The HHD lab also supported MVCD in a time of need, to store samples, during an event when a generator did not work during an emergency.

- **The educational** section of MVC has offered workshops on vectors, VBD, and pesticides. These training courses are accessible to HHD and other CoH Departments as the associated continuing education units (CEUs) can impact both pesticide applicators and registered sanitarians who are the public facing technicians and enforcement staff for both agencies.

Veterinary Public Health

HHD Bureau of Laboratory Services performs all rabies testing county-wide. Pet registration requirements and costs are aligned across HCPH County Pets and BARC.

Key Collaborations:

- HCPH & BARC have worked together to align animal registration costs and requiring all pets to have a microchip.
- HCPH & BARC have held multiple joint patrols for loose animals in problem areas along jurisdictional lines
- HCPH & BARC have participated in multi-agency town halls where we inform the community of operational updates.
- HCPH and BARC have regular tag-ups about trends seen with cruelty, aggressive animals, and possible rabies cases.
- Both agencies are involved in the Harris County Cruelty Task Force (927Paws).

MOUs and Formal Agreements

In addition to the interagency collaboration interlocal agreement established in 2023, the following specific agreements are in place or upcoming:

- **MVCD has two agreements in development:**
 - Interlocal agreement with the Houston Parks Department to facilitate MVCD surveillance for VBD
 - An agreement with BARC (animal control) to support the collection of samples from animals entering the shelter from the CoH to enhance surveillance for VBD.
- **HCPH Dental MOU with HHD Hiram Clarke Multi-Service Center** for mobile dental services (first event scheduled November 2025).

- **HCPH Dental MOU with HHD Third Ward Multi-Service Center** (in-progress) for mobile dental services (tentative first event March 2026).
- **HHD MOU for infectious disease data** (approved this year)
- **RWGA / HHD Data-to-Care MOU** (1/1/2025–12/31/2025)
 - Purpose: Match HHD data with Ryan White-funded provider records to identify whether persons diagnosed with HIV and presumed out of care are receiving treatment through Ryan White providers and to coordinate re-engagement efforts.
- **RWGA / HHD Part A-Funded Non-Medical Case Management Contract** (3/1/2025–2/28/2026)
 - Purpose: Provide funding to HHD for non-medical case management services targeting newly diagnosed, not-in-care, and youth (13–24), supporting linkage, retention, and mitigation of barriers to care.
- **Chronic Disease Prevention MOUs with HHD Multi-Service Centers and Parks & Recreation** (effective to 09/30/2026 with renewal options)
 - Purpose: Formal partnerships to deliver chronic disease prevention programs, health education, and community-based activities across multiple sites.

Other informal/operational agreements exist across programs (immunizations, outbreak response, TB case management, maternal health referrals) that function as de facto interagency operating protocols, though not all are documented as standalone MOUs.