



COUNTY OF DUTCHESS
BOARD OF HEALTH

Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, March 19, 2026

The regular monthly meeting of the Dutchess County Board of Health was held virtually on Microsoft Teams and at the Dutchess County Department of Health (DOH), 85 Civic Center Plaza – Suite 106, Poughkeepsie, NY 12601 on the above date.

PRESENT: Jeanean Aming, Psych. NP
Amy Cocina, MD
Alexander Cohen, MD
Laura Fil, MD
John Fallon, NP
Lisa Kaul, Legislative Rep.
Melissa Nelson-Perron, MD, President (Virtual)
Rachana Tyagi, MD

ABSENT: David McNary, Vice President

DOH STAFF: Livia Santiago-Rosado, MD, MPH, FACEP, DOH Commissioner
Anthony Ruggiero, MPA, Assistant Commissioner
Jenean M. Williams-Green (Virtual)

GUEST: Samantha Lang (Resident of Beacon, NY/Healthcare Consultant)

CALL TO ORDER: Dr. Melissa Nelson-Perron called the meeting to order at 4:10 p.m.

DECLARATION OF A QUORUM – A quorum was declared. Motion to call the meeting order made by John Fallon and seconded by Dr. Alex Cohen.

MINUTES: The minutes for February 20th, 2026, were approved with no corrections. The motion was made by Dr. Amy Cocina, seconded by Dr. Alex Cohen and approved unanimously.

COMMISSIONER’S REPORT: Dr. Santiago reported on the following...

- **Health Fair – May 2nd:** Dr. Santiago reported that planning for the May 2nd Health Fair is underway. One of the lead organizers retired unexpectedly, but Natasha McPherson has taken over planning and things are progressing well. Exhibitor registration opened about two weeks ago, and nearly 40 organizations have already signed up. The event will include performances from a step team and a martial arts demo team.
- **Mobile Health Unit:** The Mobile Health Unit will return at the end of the month. It is being cleaned and prepared for the season, with April dates already scheduled. Planned locations

include Dutchess Outreach, Walmart, Town of Poughkeepsie, Fishkill, Wappingers, and Pawling. Additional requests for appearances will continue to come in as visibility increases.

- **Reappointment:** Congratulations to Dr. Santiago, who is scheduled for reappointment by the County Legislature in April!
- **Medical Examiner Update:** Dr. Guajardo, the new Chief Medical Examiner starts on Monday, March 23rd, 2026. He previously served as Deputy Medical Examiner in Utah and is originally from New York. He will attend the April Board meeting.
- **Dutchess County Transit:** Amanda Sammon and Yalitz Benitez will present at the April meeting and talk about public transportation access—an issue raised in several prior meetings—and provide an opportunity for Board members to ask questions.
- Dr. Santiago shared that she will be participating in a CME event at Phelps Memorial Hospital focused on early-onset cancer, an area of growing concern—especially among people under 50 and with noted disparities affecting women. The event runs all day tomorrow and will conclude with a panel featuring Public Health Directors and Commissioners from several counties. The goal is to explore ways that health systems, counties, and industry partners can collaborate to address rising early-onset cancer rates.

Dr. Amy Cocina asked if the Department would be doing the STI event again this year. Dr. Santiago answered that the event would be held in the fall, likely in September or October. The event is full-day training for healthcare providers, featuring State experts, DOH’s Public Health Advisors, and sessions covering best practices in sexual health, emerging trends, and communicable disease investigation. Last year’s seminar at Locust Grove was very well-received, and we are currently exploring venue options for this year.

NEW BUSINESS:

2026 Public Health Partnership Awards: The Board reviewed plans for the 2026 Public Health Partnership Awards, scheduled for Monday, April 13th at 6:30 pm in the Dutchess County Legislative Chambers. Dr. Nelson-Perron raised the idea of recognizing all nominees, noting that Northwell’s “Truly Awards” publicly acknowledges every nominee. She suggested offering brief highlights at the legislature meeting or sharing names publicly. The group agreed that the nominees’ work varied widely—ranging from mental health services to community outreach, nutrition programs, and clinical care—which made comparisons challenging.

The letter requesting nominations as well as the nomination criteria was briefly reviewed. Board Members noted that while this year’s applicant pool was exceptionally strong, they did not want to create multiple award categories that could become an annual expectation. Board Members supported giving one or two Public Health Partnership awards while still recognizing all nominees with an honorable mention. Legislator Lisa Kaul offered to highlight the full list through the Legislature or a public post and to deliver a brief speech acknowledging their contributions. The group agreed this approach would honor the breadth of public health work represented.

Final Outcome

- Two nominees received the highest number of votes and were selected as the 2026 Public Health Partnership Award recipients.

- The six remaining nominees will receive Honorable Mentions.
- Legislator Lisa Kaul will prepare and deliver a brief recognition speech at the ceremony.
- Dr. Nelson-Perron will prepare a brief highlight for each and present the awards.

LEGISLATIVE REPORT: Lisa Kaul reported on the following...

- The Legislature recently passed a resolution concerning immigration, prompting questions about whether immigration status is discouraging individuals from seeking medical care, vaccinations, or preventive services. Lisa Kaul asked if any trends have been observed related to people avoiding care due to immigration-related fears.
- Board members Dr. Laura Fil and Dr. Alex Cohen, commented that this can lead to greater reliance on the emergency room, delays in seeking treatment, and challenges with follow-up care. Community partners have also reported that some people are not engaging with mobile health services, making it difficult to understand the full extent of unmet needs. Also discussed the difficulty of tracking this issue, the importance of working with trusted community organizations, and the need to explore ways to gather de-identified information to better understand and address potential gaps in care.
- The Legislature is also looking at transportation, including how to help people access more reliable and frequent options. Lisa Kaul explained that some parts of the county have no transportation at all and that they are exploring ideas like Putnam County's microtransit system, as mentioned by Dr. Santiago in a previous meeting.
- Another major issue before the Legislature is the incinerator and its effects on asthma rates and overall air quality. The Board of Health recently had a presentation on this topic from the DC Division of Solid Waste Management and Win Waste Innovations.
- Lastly, the Legislature is also looking into PFAS contamination of wells. Anthony Ruggiero mentioned an upcoming presentation. Dr. Santiago briefly mentioned YLE (Your Local Epidemiologist) newsletter highlighting regional participation (Dutchess, Putnam, Westchester, etc.) in PFAS Well Testing initiative. Over 100 residents have already signed up, with one week left in the enrollment period. The initiative will verify eligibility, review test results, and identify households that may qualify for mitigation assistance if PFAS levels exceed established thresholds. Because private wells are unregulated and historical data is limited, results may help identify any geographic clustering or potential larger PFAS sources that could require broader remediation efforts.

Dr. Rachana Tyagi raised several policy issues for consideration, including a potential county-level sweetened beverage tax and ongoing insurance pre-authorization challenges. While the beverage tax was noted, Lisa Kaul asked the Board to identify county-level priorities. Transportation emerged as a key need, especially to improve access to medical appointments and grocery stores in rural areas with limited food access and poor walkability. Dr. Tyagi also suggested reviewing the nutritional quality of food offered at county-sponsored programs and events.


OLD BUSINESS: No report...

NEXT SCHEDULED MEETING: The next meeting will be on **Thursday, April 16th, 2026, at 4:00 pm.**

A motion was made by Dr. Rachana Tyagi to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Dr. Alex Cohen, and approved unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 5:19 pm.

Minutes signed by 

President/Vice President Signature



Jenean M. Williams-Green
Recording Secretary Signature

2026 EXECUTIVE POSITIONS FOR THE BOARD OF HEALTH

Dr. Melissa Nelson-Perron – President
David McNary – Vice President