Virginia Health Catalyst
Water Equity Taskforce
Thursday, May 21, 2020 | 10:00 - 11:30 a.m.

MINUTES

Attending: Tonya Adiches (Virginia Department of Health, Dental Health Program); McAllister Castelaz (Horizon Health Services, Inc.); Nelson Daniel (Office of Drinking Water); Brenda Davy (Virginia Tech, Department of Human Nutrition); Bob Edelman (Office of Drinking Water); Carla Hegwood (Virginia Department of Health); Heidi Hertz (Office of Governor Ralph S. Northam); Emily Keenum (Virginia Early Childhood Foundation); Marty Kilgore (Virginia Foundation for Healthy Youth); Terry Lasher (Virginia Department of Forestry); Beth Leftwich (Virginia Department of Social Services); Erin Ling (Virginia Tech, Virginia Household Water Quality Program); Dr. William Mann (Olde Towne Medical and Dental Center); Barry Matthews (Office of Drinking Water); Dwayne Roadcap (Office of Drinking Water); Hannah Robbins (Virginia Foundation for Health Youth); Danny Saggese (Virginia Foundation for Healthy Youth); Scott Vogel (Office of Drinking Water)

Staff: Sarah Bedard Holland, Lauren Sawyer, Brita Bergland, Chloe Van Zandt

Proceedings:

Desired Outcomes:
- Understand the impacts of COVID-19 on water issues
- Learn about the important role protecting Virginia's forests plays in meeting our mission
- Collectively decide on WET structure moving forward

Agenda
- Welcome and Introductions
- WET mission: all Virginians have access to safe, trusted, affordable, fluoridated water – and they drink it!
- COVID-19 and water
  - Water was being turned off in Petersburg while people weren't paying water bills. But water is so important to make steps for proper hygiene during the pandemic
  - How can this translate to water affordability?
- Have you seen COVID affect water equity?
  - Dr Mann: overwhelmed with patient request, but water not an issue. Mostly concerning disease management and access to medications
  - Erin: normal amount of questions about water safety and testing. Can't supply immediate support and analysis while their lab is closed. Private labs are operating but more expensive.
    - Concerned about access to safe water
    - Tribal areas starting go fund me sites for water for drinking and sanitation – does this translate to VA populations without access?
    - Problems exacerbated by COVID
  - Brenda: stagnant water in buildings as we're returning to work, schools, labs, etc. this could present safety issues.

- White paper speaks to this issue – from Erin: https://engineering.purdue.edu/PlumbingSafety/covid19/building-water-safety-study (Two of the authors on that paper have VT connections - I am sure they would be happy to give a quick overview to this group if there is interest.)
  - Dwayne: weekly check ins with 2800 community systems to understand their status, process changes, PPE, operators available, etc. VA Agency Response Network weekly webinars – building start ups best practices (CDC, EPA, VDH). Many topics around making sure water continues to flow
    - FAQ on website: one question about safety of drinking water during COVID. Disinfection with drinking water then you're OK: https://www.vdh.virginia.gov/drinking-water/covid-19/
      - Early on: lots of confusion and misinformation about how COVID could be contracted.
      - Worked on continuity plans to make sure things still work. Ex: broken fork lift at a operation plant couldn't be repaired
  - Heidi: school nutrition involved hand washing before going to cafeteria – will become much higher priority moving forward. Opportunity to elevate hand washing before handling food, etc.
    - HS: requirement to brush their teeth during the day, but won't be doing that during COVID. Looking for other ways to lift up oral health.
    - Traditional water fountains will not be used, rather water bottle filling stations
  - Dwayne: affordability: reaching out to water systems across VA to understand delinquency rate to monitor. 5-20% rise in delinquency rates across the board. Can impact the quality of water supply if they can't afford repairs, chemical treatments, etc.
    - Dwayne will share as appropriate: water systems hesitant to share data that may create concerns in the community publicly
  - Environment is such an important issue in water safety and trust
- Terry Lasher – VA Dept. of Forestry, Forests, Watersheds and Water Quality and Quantity (*presentation*)
- Discussion:
  - Water intake: point where the water is pumped
  - VA forests are growing; provisioning – our forests are in a really good place
  - Benefits to forests: Presence of forests decreases water treatment costs (up to 50% in rural areas). Decreases childhood asthma rates in urban areas
    - Rappahannock: forest retention alone has added to avoided water quality reduction
  - VA does a great job of conserving forest: landowners actively managing forests, easement group at DOF. Always looking for opportunities to expand upon that. Forests are getting older; mature forests sequester carbon slows a bit. Important to create diverse forests (age, size, type, etc.)
- Propsed next steps for the group: develop a Virginia specific roadmap, similar to US Water Alliance roadmaps
  - US Water Alliance – National framework for water equity, added VA-specific piece
  - Project with 10 cities to develop plan to address water challenges individually

- - Similar WET groups in 4 cities – roadmap example: background of city, challenges, and priorities for action/goals
  - Creating a state roadmap for VA: Catalyst can create background, our group outlines the challenges, WET can bring about the priorities for action – move forward with a clear mission and long-term goals
    - We know a lot of the challenges in VA and can synthesize the information
    - Gives a framework/structure for the group to match what other states are doing and then prioritize our actions going forward
  - Complicated to solve water challenges – Ex: Petersburg
  - Can find data/metrics for the background categories – Census Bureau Data is available
  - McAllister: water fluoridation is the greatest public health advancement in dentistry, but without access to water it doesn't matter
    - 21% in VA are getting water from wells (data from 2014)
    - Public health literacy must be incorporated into the challenges. Many plans don't focus on it (mostly infrastructure); we can lift this up in VA. Ex: knowing the health of their forests correlates to the health and safety of water coming from the tap
  - The group is supportive of this roadmap
  - Existing workgroup synthesizes information that already exists (infrastructure data)
  - Public health framework is more uncertain since we don't have framework
  - Dr. Mann: In the ASCE 2017 infrastructure report card, the EPA showed VA's waterworks need 6.1 billion to maintain drinking water systems. Does anyone have updated information on this issue?
  - Hannah: leaning towards Catalyst taking the lead, providing specific leadership about next steps. Overwhelming amount of topics
  - Emily: pull out clusters of areas to outline momentum to make greater impact for investment
  - Erin: helpful to think about barriers
  - Emily: What are Virginia's key strengths so we can lead from there
  - Catalyst can coordinate background info, synthesizing data, understanding existing frameworks
    - Catalyst will ID structure for these categories, but use this group to help us craft the public health piece with more prescription on non-public health aspects
    - You provide interactive and dynamic input on public health
      - Power exists in our conversation together
    - Initial workplan from Catalyst to share with the group, find where momentum exists and move forward from there
    - Next meeting: June 4, 10 a.m.

Action Items

- Catalyst will draft a Virginia Water Equity Roadmap for the group to review on June 4th.

Meeting adjourned at 11:30 p.m.