Maryland Advisory Council on Health and Wellness Council

Meeting Minutes

April 15, 2026, 4-6:00 PM

Members Present
Pamela R. Williams
Luke Hollis
Lindsay Lotter
Darryl Heggans
Mychelle Y. Farmer
Vaple I. Robinson
Lusi Martin-Braswell
Jared Meacham
Crystal N. Bell
Sam Zisow-McClean
Jonathan Dayton
Jeffrey Le
Jonas Nguh
Leigh Ann Eagle
Cameron Pollock
Amarachi Uzosike

Members Absent
Casey Scott
Seth S. Martin
Gary Gerstenblith
Tara Clemons Johnson
Aruna Nathan
Esa Davis
Mary Backley
Marsha Seidelman

MDH Staff Present
Kate Natafgi
Nkeiruka Ashiedu
Christa Thornton
Muftau Shinaba
Ilene Cervantes del Toro
Ali MacStudy
Guilmate Fuller

Members of the Public Present
Kirsten Bosak

I. Open Maryland Advisory Council on Health and Wellness

- Welcome and Agenda Review: Dr. Jonas Nguh, Council Chair, welcomed members to the April 15 meeting of the Maryland Advisory Council and reviewed the agenda, which included approval of the January 21, 2026 meeting minutes, leadership updates, committee announcements, work plan presentations, and committee meetings. Kate Natafgi conducted a roll call, confirming a quorum with 13 members present.

- January 21, 2026 Minutes Review/Approval: Members reviewed the January 21, 2026 meeting minutes. Mychelle Farmer moved to approve the minutes, and Jared Meacham seconded the motion. The motion carried.

- Leadership Transition - Welcome and Vision: Dr. Nguh introduced himself as the new Council Chair and shared his vision for a coordinated, data-driven, and equitable

approach to improving health and wellness in Maryland. He emphasized prevention, collaboration, community engagement, and strengthening partnerships across sectors.

- Heart Disease Subcommittee Chair Appointment: Dr. Nguh announced that the Heart Disease Subcommittee Chair position remains vacant and reopened the call for volunteers or nominations. He noted that follow-up outreach would be sent to council members to solicit interest.

- By-laws Ad-hoc committee announcement: Dr. Nguh announced the formation of an ad-hoc committee to review and update the council's by-laws to better reflect current operations and priorities. Members interested in serving on the committee were encouraged to contact Dr. Nguh or Mrs. Natafgi following the meeting.

II. PHHS Workplan Presentation

Ali Macstudy of the Maryland Department of Health, Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Control presented an overview of the Prevention and Health Services (PHS) Block Grant program, including the FY25 portfolio and proposed FY26 work plan. Ms. Macstudy reviewed current funding priorities, grant-supported initiatives, and the transition toward a more coordinated implementation framework focused on collective impact, evidence-based interventions, and data-driven decision-making.

Ms. Macstudy outlined proposed FY26 changes, including consolidating multiple categorical grants into two flexible grant bundles focused on prevention and chronic disease management. She noted that obesity-related efforts would continue through broader initiatives such as food security, physical activity, and diabetes prevention, while cognitive health and dementia initiatives were added in response to Maryland's aging population. She also reviewed anticipated funding reductions tied to lower federal allocations.

During discussion, Cameron Pollock expressed interest in strengthening coordination between MDH-funded programs and aging network initiatives, particularly Tai Chi and Walk With Ease programs. Ms. Macstudy noted that these partnerships are primarily coordinated through local health departments and welcomed additional collaboration opportunities.

Mychelle Farmer asked how local health department priorities are aligned with community-specific data and expressed concern about maintaining attention to youth and obesity prevention efforts. Ms. Macstudy explained that grant applications must include supporting data and that MDH also conducts statewide analyses to ensure funding aligns with documented community needs and health priorities across all age groups.

Following discussion, the council voted to approve the proposed FY26 PHS Block Grant framework for the October 1, 2026 through September 30, 2027 performance period.

The proposal passed unanimously with 10 affirmative votes and no opposing votes or abstentions.

III. Committee Action Plan Presentations

- **Diabetes**
  Sam Zisow-McClean presented the Diabetes Committee action plan, which aligns with the 2029 Maryland SHIP targets. The plan includes two goals: increasing utilization of evidence-based interventions to improve manageable A1C levels and enhancing statewide digital communication and engagement around diabetes prevention and management resources.

  Key activities include establishing referral-to-completion baseline data for evidence-based programs, conducting environmental scans, reviewing CRISP referral data, identifying barriers and gaps, monitoring program outcomes, and evaluating prior DSME/DSMES outreach efforts and resource tools.

  Ms. Ilene Cervantes del Toro noted that tracking referrals and completion data for lifestyle change programs has been a significant challenge and emphasized the committee's focus on strengthening data collection and monitoring processes moving forward.

- **Heart Disease and Stroke**
  Mr. Muftau Shinaba presented the revised Heart Disease and Stroke Committee action plan, which focuses on increasing utilization of evidence-based interventions to improve blood pressure control and establishing baseline referral-to-completion data for priority programs.

  The plan also includes efforts to strengthen committee governance and operational structure to better support the 2029 Maryland SHIP goals through formalized processes, data monitoring, and development of recommendations.

- **Physical Fitness**
  Mr. Cameron Pollock presented updates to the Physical Fitness Committee action plan, including objectives related to monitoring evidence-based physical activity programs and supporting Maryland SHIP efforts to reduce physical inactivity among adults.

  Planned activities include establishing baseline referral and participation data for programs such as Tai Chi for Arthritis and Walk With Ease, conducting quarterly reviews, refining committee operations, and developing policy and program recommendations for the Department of Health.

Mr. Pollock also shared updates on dissemination of the committee's physical activity flyer promoting 150 minutes of weekly activity and introduced the committee's exploration of the concept of "fitness deserts" to better understand disparities in access to physical activity opportunities across communities.

IV. Public Comment Period

No comments.

V. Adjournment

With no further questions, the council formally adjourned at 5:19 PM and transitioned to committee meetings.