To provide international leadership that optimizes health and quality of life along the U.S.-México border

To institutionalize a domestic focus on border health that can transcend political changes

To create an effective venue for binational discussion to address public health issues and problems affecting the U.S.-México border region

MISSION

The United States-México Border Health Commission (BHC) is pleased to present its 2012 Annual Report.

In recognition of the need for an international commission to provide leadership that can optimize health and quality of life along the U.S.-México border, the Governments of the United States of America and the United Mexican States signed the binational agreement to establish the Commission in July 2000. Since that time, the Commission’s vision and direction have assisted binational efforts at the local, state, and federal levels to improve the health of people along the border.

The Commission has continued to accomplish its objectives through the promotion of border health initiatives that address infectious and chronic disease, including the U.S.-México Border Binational Infectious Disease Conference, the U.S.-México Border Tuberculosis Consortium and Legal Forum, Healthy Border 2010/2020, and binational obesity and diabetes prevention and awareness campaigns during Border Binational Health Week.

The BHC would like to recognize the efforts of numerous individuals, organizations, the research community, and other binational public and private stakeholders whose continued work, dedication, and commitment have strengthened the foundations established by the Commission 12 years ago. Their contributions exemplify the spirit of binational communication, coordination, and collaboration that is critical to address public health challenges unique to U.S.-México border communities.

The BHC remains committed to providing leadership, bringing focus on the issues, and serving as a venue for action to improve the overall quality of life along our shared border.

GOALS

TO OUR STAKEHOLDERS

The Honorable Kathleen Sebelius Secretary U.S. Department of Health and Human Services United States of America

The Honorable Mercedes Juan Secretary Mexico Secretariat of Health United Mexican States
Optimizing health and quality of life for border residents

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The mission of the U.S.-México Border Health Commission (BHC) is to provide international leadership that optimizes health and quality of life along the U.S.-México border by facilitating binational communication, coordination, and collaboration between the two federal governments, 10 border states, 44 counties, 80 municipalities, and local stakeholders. During 2012, the BHC advanced initiatives and programs that address borderwide public health issues and shape cross-border health strategies to enhance health and wellness for all border residents.

Nurturing cross-border alliances has enabled the BHC to successfully implement its foundational initiatives and activities in binationally identified priority areas, which include access to care; strategic planning; research, data collection, and academic alliances; tuberculosis; obesity and diabetes; and infectious disease and public health emergencies. To this end, the BHC will continue to raise awareness of border public health issues, mobilize actions required to improve the border health status by strengthening decisive partnerships and venues, serve as a gateway to important border health information, and prepare its current and future leaders to execute the BHC’s mission.

The BHC acknowledges the indispensable, cross-border partnerships with and support from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the México Secretariat of Health, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Pan American Health Organization, policymakers, academic institutions, and other borderwide stakeholders who advance the work of the Commission.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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BORDER REGION AT A GLANCE

The four U.S. Offices of Border Health (OBH) and six México outreach offices work closely with their respective state health departments. The U.S. OBHs receive funding support through U.S. Department of Health and Human Services cooperative agreements provided to each of the U.S. state health departments. The México outreach offices receive funding support through the México Secretariat of Health.

The overall role of the U.S. OBHs and México outreach offices is to support and extend the BHC’s work along the border. They are strategically located in each of the 30 border counties and serve as a binational resource for border communities by offering binational public health activities, disseminating information, and providing critical links to other public and private partners.

U.S. Offices of Border Health and México Outreach Offices

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BORDER AREA

The border area, defined in U.S. Public Law §103-400 (22 U.S. Code, 290 n-5) and the La Paz Agreement of 1983 as the area 62 miles (100 kilometers) north and south of the U.S.-México border, includes 44 counties in the four U.S. border states and 80 municipalities in the six México border states.

BORDER STATES

The U.S. border states include California, Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas. The México border states include Baja California Norte, Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo León, and Tamaulipas.

BHC Central Office

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U.S. Offices of Border Health and México Outreach Offices

- Binational Health Councils
- BHC Central Office

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**STRATEGIC PRIORITIES**

The U.S.-Mexico Border Health Commission (BHC) elevates public health standards within U.S.-Mexico border communities by fostering binational, local, state, federal, and international leaders to collaborate with health professionals in strategic ways. To determine priority areas along the border, the BHC solicited community input from local, state, federal, and international stakeholders. The BHC’s Strategic Planning Committee developed six key strategic priorities.

**ACCESS TO CARE**

Convene subject matter experts and other principals from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the Mexico Secretariat of Health, and cross-border local and state leaders to address BHC strategic priorities and initiatives.

**TUBERCULOSIS**

Reduce the burden of tuberculosis (TB) in binational border communities by advancing cross-border cooperation in TB surveillance, control, education, prevention, and case management.

**OBESITY AND DIABETES**

Promote awareness of the prevalence, risk factors, and health outcomes of the obesity epidemic on the U.S.-Mexico border.

**INFECTIOUS DISEASE AND PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCIES**

Address critical infectious disease and emergency preparedness issues impacting the border region.

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**ACCESS TO CARE**

The U.S.-Mexico Border Health Commission (BHC) sponsored the border component of the 9th Annual National Infant Immunization Week (NIIW) April 21-28, 2012, in partnership with the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO). This annual weeklong event unites communities throughout the border and both nations to ensure all children are healthy and protected against vaccine-preventable diseases.

**ACCESS TO CARE**

NIW offers federal, state, and local border health organizations the opportunity to coordinate their efforts to eradicate preventable diseases in infants and children through increased vaccinations. Since 1991, the BHC has worked closely with CDC and PAHO to promote immunization efforts in the U.S.-Mexico border region in conjunction with the U.S. NIIW, the Mexico National Health Weeks, celebrated since 1991 to promote increased immunization coverage throughout Mexico, and Vaccination Week in the Americas, a PAHO campaign that promotes immunizations throughout the Americas.

To kick-off NIW, the Texas Department of State Health Services Office of Border Health, in partnership with the Tamaulipas, Nuevo Leon, and Coahuila State Secretaries of Health, CDC, PAHO, the Laredo Health Department, and several other organizations, organized an inaugural event on April 23 in Laredo, Texas. The event showcased notable health experts from CDC’s National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases, Mexico’s National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases, Mexico’s National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases, and PAHO among others.

Attendees took part in a panel discussion on the accomplishments and challenges of childhood vaccinations. Additional borderwide events included vaccine clinics, health fairs promoting vaccinations with educational materials, games, contests, and exhibits; professional workshops and trainings; immunization campaigns; and press conferences to educate the community.

Over 90 borderwide events reached more than 13,000 residents in the border region that resulted in increased vaccination coverage, especially in rural areas, and also provided an opportunity to educate at-risk populations, including teen parents and migrants.

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**ACCESS TO CARE**

Improve access to health care on the border by creating a culture of wellness and prevention, strengthening the public health infrastructure, and promoting evidence-based interventions and models of excellence.

**STRATEGIC PLANNING**

Assemble U.S. and Mexican academic and research professionals to promote border health research and policy development that can enhance border health.

**RESEARCH, DATA COLLECTION, AND ACADEMIC ALLIANCES**

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Each year, the U.S.-Mexico Border Health Commission (BHC) sponsors Border Binational Health Week (BBHW) in communities throughout the border region, providing a venue for federal, state, and local organizations, private and nonprofit partners, academic institutions, and key U.S. and Mexico leaders to interact with the binational border community in ways that educate, enable, and encourage people of all ages to adopt healthier lifestyles.

Held the first week of October, the 9th Annual BBHW, sponsored in partnership with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the Mexico Secretariat of Health, the Health Initiative of the Americas, the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), and the 10 U.S.-Mexico border states, continued to boost cross-border partnerships through the theme “Families in Action for Health” and adjoining focus “Preventing Obesity and Diabetes.”

In 2012, BBHW promoted over 170 borderwide activities that dispensed health promotion and disease prevention information, including health fairs, fora, training events, and programs highlighting obesity and diabetes.

To date, BBHW has facilitated connections between public health professionals and over 1.2 million border residents in an effort to promote sustainable partnerships that address health challenges unique to border populations. Forthcoming BBHW celebrations will continue efforts to increase community and inter-agency networking relationships, information sharing, educational opportunities, and awareness of the BHC and other state and local initiatives.

Celebrating and promoting healthy lifestyles for all ages

BBHW HIGHLIGHTS

The BHC Chihuahua Outreach Office, in collaboration with the Texas Department of State Health Services’ Office of Border Health (OBH) Region 9/10, the Health Jurisdiction of Ciudad Juárez, and the Mexican National System for Integral Family Development, held a BBHW inaugural event at Vicente Guerrero Elementary School in Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, on October 1. Over 500 elementary school students attended this event that celebrated the collaboration between U.S. and Mexico health authorities in advancing obesity and diabetes education and prevention, especially among children and adolescents.

The California Outreach Office, in partnership with Planned Parenthood of the Pacific Southwest and in collaboration with the Health Resources and Services Administration and other supporting organizations, co-hosted a regional BBHW closing event in Chula Vista, California, on October 4, in conjunction with the 4th Annual Binational Dialogue to address the status of women’s reproductive rights in the United States and Mexico.

The BHC Chihuahua Outreach Office, in collaboration with the Texas Department of State Health Services (DHSS) Office of Border Health (OBH) Region 9-10, the Health Jurisdiction of Ciudad Juárez, and the Mexican National System for Integral Family Development, held a BBHW inaugural event at Vicente Guerrero Elementary School in Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, on October 1. Over 500 elementary school students attended this event that celebrated the collaboration between U.S. and Mexico health authorities in advancing obesity and diabetes education and prevention, especially among children and adolescents.

The Mexico Secretariat of Health, Baja California State Secretariat of Public Health Services, and BHC Outreach Office hosted a regional BBHW closing event in Tijuana, Baja California, on October 5 to commemorate approximately 20 events held locally in the Baja California-California region. Key participants included Dr. Lawrence Khaz, BHC Member-California, Dr. Alfonso Valenzuela, BHC Member-Baja California, Dr. Gaedalia Rangel, Delegate, Mexico Secretary of Health, and Dr. Gustavo Durante, Health Promotion and Family Health Officer, PAHO. BBHW is held in conjunction with Mexico’s 3rd National Health Week each year, demonstrating a binational effort to improve border health.

The BHC Chihuahua Outreach Office, in collaboration with the Texas Department of State Health Services (DHSS) Office of Border Health (OBH) Region 9-10, the Health Jurisdiction of Ciudad Juárez, and the Mexican National System for Integral Family Development, held a BBHW inaugural event at Vicente Guerrero Elementary School in Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, on October 1. Over 500 elementary school students attended this event that celebrated the collaboration between U.S. and Mexico health authorities in advancing obesity and diabetes education and prevention, especially among children and adolescents.

Over 200 health professionals attended the 9th Annual Faces of Diabetes Conference, on October 19 in El Paso, Texas. Sponsored by the El Paso Diabetes Association, with assistance from Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center, Univision Medical Center of El Paso, Texas, the Texas DHSS OBH, the San Juan Department of Health OBH, Paso del Norte Children’s Development Center, and the City of El Paso, the conference facilitated discussion on diabetes prevention, treatment, management, and research.
Established by the BHC as a binational agenda on health promotion and disease prevention in March 2001, the Healthy Border (HB) 2010 initiative represents a binational strategy intended to improve health outcomes along the U.S.-México border. Originally founded within the framework of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Healthy People 2010, the U.S. Healthy Gente, and México’s Salud del Programa Nacional de Salud de México (National Health Indicators), HB 2010 established a set of leading health indicators designed to help health experts, organizations, and communities prioritize health issues and develop sustainable health programs in the U.S.-México border region. As part of the five-phase, five-year HB 2010/2020 strategic framework, a border binational work group of health experts was established to evaluate and close out HB 2010 as well as initiate the development and implementation of HB 2020.

In 2012, the BHC completed Phase III of the five-phase HB strategic plan and initiated Phase IV. To this end, the Arizona Department of Health Services Office of Border Health, the Baja California and Sonora Outreach Offices, and the University of Arizona Mel and Enid Zuckerman College of Public Health convened the third set of meetings of the HB 2010/2020 Border Binational Technical Work Group (BBTWG) in April and June 2012, in Phoenix, Arizona, bringing together health experts from U.S. and México federal and state health agencies to draft the HB 2010 Joint Closeout Report and begin developing the HB 2020 agenda.

Maternal and Child Health Epidemiology Program

The Border Maternal and Child Health (BorderMACH) initiative, which aims to strengthen U.S.-México collaboration in Maternal and Child Health (MCH), completed its third full year at the BHC in 2012. BorderMACH is a major focus of the Maternal and Child Health Epidemiology Program (MCHEP), a collaborative effort between the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Health Resources and Services Administration/Maternal Child Health Bureau, which helps promote improved health and wellbeing for women, children, and families at state, local, and tribal levels.

In May 2009, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ Office of Global Affairs and the National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion at CDC signed a memorandum of understanding to support the enhancement of epidemiologic capacity in maternal and child health and health promotion in the border region. BorderMACH supports binational sister-city teams of public health program directors, policy experts, epidemiologists, and other health officials in communities working to better use existing reproductive health data in the border region.

Institutions collaborating with the BHC include the México Secretariat of Health, the National Institute of Public Health, the Mexican Social Security Institute, the National Center for Health Statistics/CDC, CityMatCH, and U.S. and México local and state health departments and academic institutions.

In May 2011, the second BorderMACH workshop was held in El Paso, Texas. Four BorderMACH teams participated, including teams from Tijuana-San Diego County, Nogales-Santa Cruz County, Juárez-El Paso/Evita Ana County, and Cameron County-Matamoros communities. The workshop curriculum focused on project proposal and logic model development and emphasized the role of local data in these activities through practical team exercises. Proposals the teams drafted during the workshop currently serve as templates for further binational collaboration in MCH.

In addition to BorderMACH activities, MCHEP staff also conducts collaborative binational research in MCH and related topics, disseminates their findings at national meetings and in peer-reviewed journals, and provides technical assistance to local and state health departments in the region.
Non-communicable diseases (NCDs), or chronic diseases, are rapidly becoming the leading causes of premature death and preventable morbidity in resource-limited communities throughout the United States and Mexico. To address this global crisis, leading public health experts from around the world assembled at the New Frontiers in Global Health Leadership: Building Strong Health Systems to Respond to Non-Communicable Disease inaugural forum March 28-31 in Tucson, Arizona, an event hosted by the Global Health Institute at the University of Arizona Mel and Enid Zuckerman College of Public Health in collaboration with the U.S.-Mexico Border Health Commission, the Tohono O’odham Department of Health and Human Resources, and Henkel, Inc.

The forum brought together approximately 60 participants to promote a strategic assessment of case studies from Southern Arizona, the Tohono O’odham Nation, and the U.S.-Mexico border region in light of culturally-tailored, global NCD, and chronic disease models generated in response to recommendations from the 2011 United Nations Non-Communicable Diseases Summit.

In addition, participants were encouraged to contribute to a more effective global response to NCDs by sharing and exchanging best practices during facilitated case study application work groups as well as site visits to local community health centers, where attendees gained first-hand knowledge of local health systems. By connecting at a community level, health experts actively worked to strengthen local and global health systems, specifically regarding quality assurance, health workforce development, integration, and health information systems and referral.

Native and immigrant communities in the border region suffer from some of the highest rates of chronic diseases in the world. In response, local models have emerged to integrate health systems, address human resource limitations, maximize the value of promotores, and improve the quality of care for chronic conditions.

One of the most critical public health challenges faced by governmental agencies, research institutions, and health care professionals working to improve quality of life and health within U.S.-Mexico border communities is the lack of a comprehensive border health research agenda that advances effective, evidence-based interventions. In pursuit of this agenda, the BHC assembled U.S. and Mexico federal, state, academic, government, and non-governmental organizations at the fourth U.S.-Mexico Border Health Research (BHR) Forum on June 5 in San Diego, California. Hosted by the California Outreach Office and California Department of Public Health, in collaboration with the Baja California Outreach Office, the BHR Forum provided a venue for public health leaders to continue their efforts to develop cross-border research that allows policymakers to establish and strengthen binational health policies.

In 2012, participants identified opportunities and mechanisms to establish guidelines for a binational institutional review board (IRB) process; determined processes for collaborative cross-border research that can be replicated; discussed updates on the proposal to establish a journal of border health; and promoted resource sharing and collaborative partnerships.

Additional topics addressed included an update on the Healthy Border 2010 Joint Closeout Report and ethical considerations in research. This year also included presentations on binational research projects that highlighted specific studies and the efforts of researchers and border organizations to promote border binational research.

The BHC plans to convene the next BHR Forum in 2013 to address topics related to ethical issues in research, promote binational research, and identify scalable methods to disseminate research. Through this forum, the BHC will sustain its efforts to identify strategies to develop and implement an expansive border health research agenda that can initiate enduring, coordinated dialogues and actions focused on understanding the current and future border health research environment.
The U.S.-México Border Health Commission (BHC) convened the 3rd Annual U.S.-México Border Tuberculosis (TB) Consortium Meeting and Legal Forum, hosted by the New Mexico Department of Health’s (NM DOH) Office of Border Health (OBH), in collaboration with the California Outreach Office, California Department of Public Health, and the Chihuahua Outreach Office on May 7-8 in Las Cruces, New Mexico.

The meeting and legal forum brought together federal, state, and local TB program managers, federal law enforcement officials, legal experts, consular officials, and medical care providers representing both U.S. and México government and non-government organizations to develop work groups and action plans that reinforce binational and borderwide responses to binational TB issues.

Border public health and legal experts addressed the need to improve continuity of care and binational TB treatment completion rates; augment TB patient management coordination among U.S. and Mexican state and federal legal frameworks; establish uniform Meet and Greet standards and guidelines applicable to all TB patients deported from the United States to México; and analyze treatment regimens for multidrug-resistant (MDR)-TB and TB with comorbidities, with an emphasis on diabetes, HIV/AIDS, and Coccioidiomycosis.

To address these topics, the TB Continuity of Care, Binational MDR-TB Expert Network, and TB Legal Issues Work Groups were established, each developing an action plan to address overall meeting objectives and other topic-specific issues. With assistance from the NM DOH OBH, the Chihuahua Outreach Office, and the BHC, each work group will investigate these actions throughout the year and provide updates at the 4th Annual U.S.-México Border Tuberculosis Consortium Meeting and Legal Forum, scheduled for May 2013 in Las Cruces, New Mexico.

The BHC continued its support for the New Mexico-Chihuahua Tuberculosis (TB) Pilot Project, a three-year binational initiative began in 2009 to decrease TB in the New Mexico-Chihuahua border region through efforts to enhance surveillance and treatment of all patients diagnosed with active and latent TB and to prevent MDR-TB.

The TB pilot project was coordinated through the NM DOH OBH, TB Program, and Public Health Region 5 as well as the Chihuahua State Health Services, the JUNTOS Project, and the Migrant Clinicians Network. In 2012, the project provided education and treatment under Directly Observed Therapy to active TB patients, implemented adherence strategies for at-risk patients, coordinated contact investigations, and expanded project infrastructure and outreach to include rural areas.
To address the obesity epidemic, the Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) Office of Border Health (OBH), in partnership with the Nuevo León, Tamaulipas, Coahuila, and Chihuahua Outreach Offices, organized four regional mini fora to identify interventions relevant to obesity-related issues affecting various border communities. Organized in Presidio, McAllen, Del Rio, and Eagle Pass, Texas, throughout November and December, the mini fora included participants from the 10 border states, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Health Resources and Services Administration, regional academic institutions, local health departments, the Pan American Health Organization, binational health councils, and other stakeholders. Participants worked toward developing greater awareness of obesity and its related effects; identifying the needs and abilities of border communities to serve as recommendations for action by federal and state agencies; and improving community involvement in the planning and implementation of intervention strategies.

Information gathered from these fora will assist the Texas DSHS OBH and the Chihuahua Outreach Office in development of the U.S.-México Border Obesity Prevention Summit (BOPS) scheduled for July 2013. A priority list of recommendations and interventions that can help reduce the prevalence of obesity and its consequences within border communities is currently being generated from fora results and will be presented at the BOPS.

Along the Texas border, approximately two-thirds of adults are overweight and nearly one-third is obese. Texas border residents are also less likely than residents of non-border counties to engage in leisure-time physical activity and complications associated with obesity, including diabetes, are higher in border counties than in non-border counties. 

*Data taken from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2011 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System.
The third U.S.-Mexico Border Influenza Disease (BBID) Conference took place on May 22-24 in Austin, Texas, bringing together federal, state, and local partners from both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border to address critical infectious disease and emergency preparedness issues impacting the region as well as approaches to address those issues.

Sponsored by the U.S.-Mexico Border Health Commission (BHC) and organized by the Texas Department of State Health Services Office of Border Health, in collaboration with the Chihuahua Outreach Office, the three-day conference included panel discussions on binational preparedness, surveillance, epidemiology, and the cross-border sharing of public health items. Participants received additional networking opportunities through a panel session and training in data visualization for epidemiology and surveillance.

In total, 150 participants representing federal, state, and local health agencies and laboratories from all 10 U.S. and Mexico border states attended the conference, including the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, Pan American Health Organization; México Secretariat of Health; Diagnostic and Surveillance Services Office of Border Health, New Mexico Department of Health; and Mexico’s State Secretaries of Health.

Conference attendees shared a common interest in significant advances in border and binational disease surveillance over the past year, most notably the signing of the Guidelines for United States-Mexico Coordination on Public Health Emergencies of Mutual Interest (Guidelines) by the U.S. and Mexican Secretaries of Health at the World Health Assembly on May 22, 2012. In recognition of the Guidelines, border health agencies and practitioners have established various approaches to improve the cross-border transport of public health items, information sharing, and communication. Collaboration among U.S. and Mexican counterparts has proven critical to successful binational surveillance, outbreak investigations, and the control and prevention of infectious diseases on both sides of the border.

BHC members plan to convene the next BBID Conference in 2014 to continue building relationships and strategic alliances that facilitate binational collaboration on infectious disease, emergency preparedness, and policy development issues affecting the U.S. and Mexico border region.
As the Commission moves forward into 2013, BHC members will continue to engage public health leaders from both sides of the border to generate awareness of significant health issues and will promote sustainable partnerships to address these issues. High priority activities include increasing access to care, improving tuberculosis response and management, and promoting obesity and diabetes prevention, as well as addressing other issues that may arise.

The U.S.-México border region remains an area with significant health disparities and unique public health challenges. The BHC is fully committed to working with its partners so that all residents can enjoy optimal health and a high quality of life.