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# CATTARAUGUS COUNTY BOARD OF HEALTH

1 Leo Moss Drive, Olean, NY 14760, Tel. (716)373-8050, Fax (716) 701-



**Public Health**  
Prevent. Promote. Protect.  
**Cattaraugus County**  
Health Department

Established 1923

*Mayor David L. Smith, President*

*Legislator Kelly Andreano, Vice-President*

*Joseph Bohan, MD*

*Zahid Chohan, MD*

*Thomas Spigel, MD*

*Kathryn Cooney Thrush, NP, MSN*

*Shane Pancio*

*Theresa Raftis*

*Legislator Ginger D. Schroder, Esq.*

## MINUTES April 1, 2026

The 941<sup>st</sup> meeting of the Cattaraugus County Board of Health (BOH) was held at the Old Library Restaurant on April 1, 2026.

*The following members were present:*

Kelly Andreano, Legislator

Dr. Zahid Chohan

Kathryn Cooney-Thrush, NP, MSN

Theresa Raftis

Ginger Schroder, Esq., Legislator

Mayor David Smith

Dr. Thomas Spigel

*Also present were:*

Kevin D. Watkins, MD, MPH, Public Health Director

Erin Whitcomb, County Attorney

Ray Jordan, Senior Public Health Sanitarian (Virtual)

Debra Lacher, Secretary to the Public Health Director

James Lawrence, Emergency Preparedness Director

Shane Lehman, Guest-St. Bonaventure University Student

Rick Miller, Catt Co. News Photos/Olean Star (Virtual)

Lynne Moore, Director of Nursing

Adam Packer, Resource Specialist

Dave Porter, Hearing Officer

Robert Ring, Environmental Health Director

Ben Vitale, Guest-St. Bonaventure University Student

Gilbert Witte, MD, Medical Director

Mayor Smith called the meeting of the BOH to order and welcomed attendees. A roll call was conducted, confirming that a quorum was present.

Mayor Smith called for a motion to approve the March 4, 2026 BOH meeting minutes. A motion was made by Ms. Raftis, seconded by Dr. Spigel and unanimously approved.



**DIRECTOR'S REPORT:** Dr. Watkins presented the department's 2025 Annual Report. Copies were distributed to those in attendance; additional copies will be provided to County legislators and the report will be posted on the department's website for public access.

The Annual Report provides a comprehensive overview of programs across the department. Within the Nursing Division, several programs are administered by nursing staff, including the Certified Home Health Agency (CHHA). In 2025, the CHHA maintained an average daily census of (209) patients with (916) unduplicated admissions, compared to an average daily census of (229) patients and (1,045) unduplicated admissions in 2024. This reflects a continued downward trend in both census and admissions over the past five years, which is also observed across service disciplines such as physical therapy, occupational therapy, and skilled nursing. In response to evolving federal and state requirements, particularly changes in payment methodologies and increased accountability standards that have reduced reimbursement rates, the home care program implemented operational adjustments in 2025 to improve efficiency, transparency, and patient access. These changes included strategic staffing reductions to streamline service delivery while maintaining quality of care.

In 2025, the Maternal Child Health Program conducted (58) skilled home visits to pregnant and postpartum women, infants, and children. Staff also administered (12) RhoGAM injections to postpartum Rh-negative mothers with Rh-positive infants. In collaboration with the New York State Department of Health Wadsworth Laboratory, (85) newborn screenings were completed.

The Community Health Clinics continues to provide a range of services, including family planning, with the goal of reducing adolescent and unintended pregnancies across all age groups and preventing diseases affecting reproductive health. In 2025, two teenage pregnancies were recorded, a significant decrease from (16) positive teenage pregnancy tests reported in 2023. It is noted that this decline may be influenced in part by a transition in providers during the year, which resulted in fewer clinical exams being conducted.

Another Community Health Clinic, is the department's Sexually Transmitted Infection (STI) Clinic, which provides testing and treatment for conditions including chlamydia, gonorrhea, syphilis, trichomonas, herpes, and HIV. In 2025, chlamydia remained the most commonly reported STI, followed by gonorrhea and syphilis. A five-year trend analysis indicates an overall decline in reported cases of these infections, which is generally a positive indicator in public health. However, the reduction in reported chlamydia cases, from (189) in 2021 to (62) in 2025, may be influenced by decreased screening and testing, as the infection is often asymptomatic and dependent on routine screening for detection.

The Lead Poisoning Prevention Program monitored (87) blood lead levels (BLLs) above 5 µg/dL in 2025, compared to (78) cases in 2024. Ongoing surveillance and intervention efforts remain critical to ensuring that children are not adversely affected by elevated lead exposure.

Within the Environmental Health Division, the department was awarded a \$4.4 million Lead Hazard Reduction Grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) in 2025. This funding builds upon a previous \$2.5 million grant awarded in 2023 and will support efforts to identify and remediate lead-based paint hazards in eligible privately owned housing, including both owner-occupied and rental properties.

Also under Environmental Health, the Public Water System Program, staff works closely with system operators and management personnel throughout Cattaraugus County. In 2025, staff conducted required inspections of (85) public water systems and (367) private water systems.

Environmental Health staff also regulated (490) food service establishments in 2025, compared to (560) in 2024. Routine inspections are conducted to ensure compliance with New York State and Cattaraugus County sanitary codes, supporting food safety and public health protection across the county.

Environmental Health (EH) staff respond to all reported potential rabies exposures in the county. As part of program requirements, EH conducts a minimum of four free rabies vaccination clinics annually for domestic animals. All dogs, cats, and ferrets aged four months and older are required to be vaccinated against rabies in accordance with New York State law. In 2025, EH conducted (228) animal bite investigations and administered (1,370) rabies vaccinations to pets. These figures remain consistent with prior years, reflecting sustained demand and ongoing community compliance.

Environmental Health is also responsible for enforcement of the Clean Indoor Air Act (CIAA), enacted in 2003, which requires unannounced compliance inspections at regulated facilities. In 2025, staff completed (84) compliance checks, with no violations identified.

In addition, EH enforces the Adolescent Tobacco Use Prevention Act (ATUPA), which prohibits the sale of tobacco products to individuals under the age of 21. In 2025, the department conducted (97) ATUPA compliance checks across (51) licensed establishments. One violation involving the sale of tobacco to a minor was documented.

Environmental Health initiated a total of (15) formal enforcement actions for various violations in 2025, with (7) cases resulting in the issuance of enforcement fines.

The Department's Health Education Program continues to provide a broad range of community-based education and outreach services, including hand hygiene, dental health, nutrition, communicable disease prevention, lead poisoning prevention, rabies awareness, and the Veggie Wheels program, among others.

In 2025, the Veggie Wheels program served (1,144) individuals of all ages, an increase from (844) individuals in 2024. Program enhancements included the addition of eggs and an expanded selection of fresh fruits and vegetables, further improving access to nutritious foods within the community.

Additional department programs include Early Intervention, Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), Public Health Laboratory Services, Public Health Emergency Preparedness, and the Healthy Neighborhoods Program.

In 2025, the department was successfully reaccredited by the Public Health Accreditation Board (PHAB). This achievement reflects the department's continued commitment to performance excellence, accountability, and the delivery of high-quality public health services to county residents.

For 2025, total department revenue was (\$13,761,667). The primary sources of revenue were service fees (41%) and the County contribution (30%). Fee revenue was largely driven by the home care program, which accounted for approximately (76%) of total fee collections. Total expenditures for 2025 were (\$13,761,667), with the majority of costs attributed to the home care program, followed by Environmental Health services.

Dr. Spigel expressed appreciation for the depth and quality of the Annual Report, noting that the level of detail was impressive and commending staff for their work. Dr. Spigel inquired about the follow-up process for restaurant inspections when violations are identified, observing that relatively few fines appear to be issued.

Dr. Watkins responded that enforcement actions for restaurants are guided by the severity and nature of the violation. Critical (“red”) violations, those that have the potential to directly contribute to foodborne illness, are required to be corrected immediately. Non-critical (“blue”) violations are less severe and do not pose an immediate threat to public health but must still be addressed. Dr. Watkins further explained that these establishments are brought before the Board of Health only in situations where closure is being considered, which has not been necessary in recent periods. While monetary penalties are rarely imposed for inspection violations at these facilities, Environmental Health staff conduct follow-up inspections to ensure compliance. Repeat violations are documented, and staff provides education and corrective guidance to food service operators to support sustained compliance.

Dr. Chohan asked whether the Health Department currently offers dental services or if the County could explore providing such services. Dr. Watkins responded that while the County has the capacity to develop a dental program, current reimbursement rates would likely make the program financially unsustainable and potentially cost-prohibitive. He noted that dental services are available locally through Universal Primary Care (UPC), a federally qualified health center with offices in Houghton and Bradford, with potential plans for future expansion. Dr. Watkins also shared that the department is exploring opportunities to incorporate fluoride varnish applications into existing services. Fluoride varnish is a highly concentrated fluoride treatment applied to the teeth that hardens upon contact with saliva, creating a protective layer that helps prevent tooth decay.

A motion to accept the 2025 Annual Report as presented was made by Dr. Spigel, seconded by Dr. Chohan, and approved unanimously by the Board.

Dr. Watkins reported that a new Nurse Practitioner, Kerime (Kerry) Perese, requires credentialing approval, along with re-credentialing for two existing providers within the department. He noted that credentialing and re-credentialing occur on a routine cycle every two to three years. Practitioner Perese is a licensed Nurse Practitioner in New York State who meets all required education, training, and certification standards. Her credentials have been verified in accordance with the department’s policy.

Dr. Watkins further stated that re-credentialing is required for Dr. Witte, the department’s Medical Director, and Dr. Higgs, the Laboratory Director, both of whom are licensed physicians in New York State. Their credentials have also been reviewed and verified by the department, and documentation has been shared with the Board of Health President.

A motion to approve the credentialing and re-credentialing, as presented, was made by Mrs. Cooney-Thrush and seconded by Dr. Chohan. The motion carried with unanimous support, with one abstention. Legislator Schroder abstained, noting her preference to review the credentialing documentation prior to approval. It was agreed that all credentialing materials will be distributed to Board members following the meeting to allow for thorough review.

Dr. Watkins also shared that Mayor Smith has been named the 2026 Assistant Principal of the Year by the School Administrators' Association of New York State (SAANYS), Region 12. Mayor Smith will be formally recognized on May 11<sup>th</sup> at the Columns Banquet in Elma, New York.

**ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH REPORT:** Mr. Ring reported that the spring and summer season brings a significant increase in community events throughout the county, requiring enhanced Environmental Health (EH) oversight. This includes inspections of temporary food vendors, food trucks, and special event operations to ensure compliance with public health regulations.

Mr. Ring further reported that in preparation for potential aerial larvicide spraying, the Environmental Health Division is hoping to hire two seasonal Health Program Mosquito Aides for the summer. These aides will assist with mosquito surveillance activities, including trap placement and daily mosquito counts. Additionally, the department is applying for the necessary permits through the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC). A total of four permits are required, and the application process is currently underway.

Mr. Ring also noted growing concerns regarding the increase in vape shops in the communities. While staff actively monitor and address these operations, unlicensed establishments continue to present enforcement challenges. Many open without required permits, and the department's authority to take direct enforcement action is limited. Reports are submitted to the State for follow-up; however, enforcement actions, including closures, are the responsibility of State agencies.

Mr. Ring provided an update on the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) well and septic program, which continues to be promoted to eligible low- to moderate-income households. The program currently has capacity for an additional (10–15) projects. With the arrival of favorable weather conditions, construction activities have resumed. In the past month, new wells were installed for three households that had been without a reliable water source for several months.

Dr. Chohan expressed concern regarding the increasing prevalence of vaping and its associated health risks, noting that emerging evidence suggests more significant lung damage compared to traditional tobacco use. He further commented that the issue appears insufficiently controlled. Dr. Watkins acknowledged the concern and reiterated that while the department is actively engaged, enforcement limitations exist when dealing with unlicensed operations. He explained that, in the absence of local enforcement authority, the department must rely on State-level intervention. Dr. Watkins suggested that one potential solution would be for the Board of Health to develop a local law and recommend that the county legislature consider adopting the local law to provide enhanced enforcement authority against illegal vape shops.

Dr. Witte noted that similar approaches have been taken historically, such as with the Clean Indoor Air Act and other local regulations that preceded statewide legislation. Legislator Andreano recommended that the matter be brought forward for further discussion at the May meeting of the Human Services Committee.

**NURSING DIVISION REPORT:** Mrs. Moore reported that the current Certified Home Health Agency (CHHA) census stands at (128) patients.

Lead Program Update: In March, a total of (90) lead tests were conducted. One child was identified with an elevated venous blood lead level (BLL) of 13.3 µg/dL (reference level: <5 µg/dL), reflecting an improvement from 18 µg/dL in February. The next highest BLL recorded was 10 µg/dL; this child previously had a peak level of 12 µg/dL in December 2025. A child who had a significantly elevated BLL of 47 µg/dL in July 2024 has demonstrated substantial improvement, with a current level of 7 µg/dL. The remaining (87) children tested had BLLs at or below 5 µg/dL. The total active lead caseload is currently (54) children.

Mrs. Moore also reported that Kerime Perese, Nurse Practitioner, has returned to the clinic on a part-time basis. Practitioner Perese will provide services in Olean on Mondays, Salamanca on Tuesdays, and in the Machias office one day per month.

No HIV testing was completed in the month of March.

Rabies Prophylaxis:

Pre-exposure: No vaccinations were administered in March.

Post-exposure: One individual completed a rabies vaccination series following a bat exposure that occurred while traveling in Cancun.

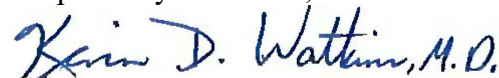
Reportable Diseases for March included: Chlamydia: (8) cases; Gonorrhea: (1) case; Strep Group A: (2) cases; Hepatitis C: (2) chronic cases; Lyme: (11) probable cases; Strep pneumoniae: (1) case; Influenza A: (37) cases in March compared to (90) cases in the month of February; Influenza B: (199) cases in March compared to (101) cases in February; COVID-19: (81) cases in March compared to (84) in February; and RSV: (53) cases in March compared to (41) in February.

Ms. Moore noted shifting seasonal trends, including a decline in Influenza A cases and increases in Influenza B and RSV, while COVID-19 activity remained relatively stable compared to the previous month.

**Old/New Business:** Mayor Smith stated there is no old or new business. The next meeting will be held on Tuesday, May 5, 2026. Mayor Smith then called for a temporary recess of the regular meeting to enter into executive session for the purpose of discussing financial information as it relates to a division within the department.

At the conclusion of the executive session, during which no action was taken, a motion to adjourn the regular meeting was made by Dr. Spiegel and seconded by Legislator Schroder. The motion carried unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,



Kevin D. Watkins, M.D., M.P.H.  
Secretary to the Board of Health