



Monterey County

Item No.

Board Report

Board of Supervisors
Chambers
168 W. Alisal St., 1st Floor
Salinas, CA 93901

Legistar File Number: 22-237

March 15, 2022

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Receive an updated response to **Board Referral No. 2021.16** seeking to combat health misinformation and curb the spread of falsehoods that threaten the health and safety of our residents and visitors.

RECOMMENDATION:

It is recommended that the Board of Supervisors:

Receive an updated response to **Board Referral No. 2021.16** seeking to combat health misinformation and curb the spread of falsehoods that threaten the health and safety of our residents and visitors.

SUMMARY/DISCUSSION:

Board Referral No. 2021-16 (Attachment A) assigned on September 14, 2021, requests the County Administrative Officer and the Monterey County Health Department implement the areas of action cited by the Surgeon General of the United States Dr. Vivek H. Murthy in his advisory entitled “Confronting Health Misinformation” (Advisory) (Attachment B). U.S. Surgeon Murthy issued his first Advisory on July 15, 2021, to warn the public about the urgent threat of health misinformation, including disinformation which has threatened the nation’s public health response to COVID-19.

As stated in the Advisory, addressing health misinformation will require a “whole-of-society” effort and as such includes a call to action for all stakeholders including individuals, families, and communities as well as the education, healthcare, media, technology, research, philanthropy, and government sectors. Specifically, governments can take the following actions:

- Convene federal, state, local, territorial, tribal, private, nonprofit, and research partners
- Increase investment in research on misinformation
- Continue to modernize public health communications
- Increase resources and technical assistance to state and local public health agencies
- Expand efforts to build long-term resilience to misinformation

Board Referral No. 2021.16 identifies these additional strategies:

- Identify and label health misinformation and disseminate timely health information to counter misinformation that is impeding our ability to keep our community safe
- Continue to focus on community engagement strategies, including partnerships with trusted messengers and the Monterey County VIDA program
- Work with the medical community and local partners to enhance our County of Monterey website that will serve as a central resource for combating health misinformation in our

community

On October 5, 2021, Monterey County Health Department staff provided its initial response to this Referral, focusing on the role and actions that governments can take (Attachment C). The County of Monterey as the lead in our COVID-19 response efforts, and in collaboration with the COVID-19 Collaborative led by the Community Foundation for Monterey County (CFMC), other stakeholders, and County residents, has implemented a multi-pronged approach in responding to the pandemic.

In its initial response, staff highlighted the great work of the VIDA (Virus Integrated Distribution of Aid) Program, which was created in response to the community's need to receive information in their preferred language from trusted leaders or Community Health Workers (CHW). VIDA continues to be instrumental in addressing myths about the COVID-19 virus, testing, treatments, and the vaccine, specifically amongst our Spanish speaking and African Americans/Black residents. During the Omicron surge, the CHWs supported residents in accessing vaccination services, implemented neighborhood-based pop-up testing services in communities most impacted by pandemic, and referred residents to available rental subsidy supports, the replacement income Stipend to Isolate Pilot, and Home for the Harvest as appropriate.

The County, through an agreement with TMD Creative and in collaboration with the COVID-19 Collaborative Communications Working Group, continued to develop and disseminate bilingual and culturally appropriate messages and public service announcements for public consumption through social media, print, radio, and television platforms. Although Phase 3 of COVID-19 paid messaging ended December 31, 2022, County communications staff continue to disseminate messages on prevention, mitigation, and vaccination via social media platforms. Social media has been aimed at rebutting the most common myths by sharing videos, infographics, and other means of dispelling myths and misinformation. County communications staff is actively monitor social media sites and countering with accurate information.

The County Health Officer and Director of Public Health continue to participate on weekly Media Briefings to respond to questions on COVID-19 response efforts and updated State recommendations. The County Communications Ad Hoc committee meets weekly to better understand and respond to misinformation circulating via social media platforms and other means of communication.

With respect to the role government can play in increasing investments in research on misinformation, the County is partnering with California State University Monterey Bay and other stakeholders, in the development of a study to quantify the harms of health misinformation, particularly among African American/Black residents, in an effort to increase trust of local agencies and increase vaccine readiness and acceptance.

Staff will continue to implement appropriate strategies to combat misinformation on COVID and other topics to assure the public has access to accurate information in their language and communication method of choice and by trusted messengers.

This work supports the Monterey County Health Department 2018-2022 Strategic Plan Initiatives: 1.

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Empower the community to improve health through programs, policies, and activities; and 2. Enhance community health and safety by emphasizing prevention; and 3. Ensure access to culturally and linguistically appropriate, customer-friendly quality health services. It also supports several of the ten essential public health services, specifically: 3. Inform, educate, and employer people about health issues, 4. Mobilize community partnerships and action to identify and solve health problems.

OTHER AGENCY INVOLVEMENT:

The County Departments of Health Department, County Administrative Office, and Natividad work collaboratively with the CFMC, VIDA and other stakeholders in addressing misinformation on COVID-19 through social media and other media platforms, community newsletters, community educational forums, face to face, and other communication channels to assure the public has the correct COVID-19 information on prevention, mitigation, and vaccination efforts.

FINANCING:

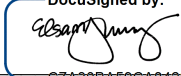
There is no impact to the County General Fund with receipt of this report.

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS STRATEGIC INITIATIVES:

Check the related Board of Supervisors Strategic Initiatives:

- Economic Development:
 - Through collaboration, strengthen economic development to ensure a diversified and healthy economy.
- Administration:
 - Promote an organization that practices efficient and effective resource management and is recognized for responsiveness, strong customer orientation, accountability and transparency.
- Health & Human Services:
 - Improve health and quality of life through County supported policies, programs, and services; promoting access to equitable opportunities for healthy choices and healthy environments in collaboration with communities.
- Infrastructure:
 - Plan and develop a sustainable, physical infrastructure that improves the quality of life for County residents and supports economic development results.
- Public Safety:
 - Create a safe environment for people to achieve their potential, leading businesses and communities to thrive and grow by reducing violent crimes as well as crimes in general.

Prepared and Approved by:

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 Date: 3/8/2022 | 8:39 PM PST
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Elsa Mendoza Jimenez, Health Director, 755-4526

Attachments:

A. Referral No. 2021.16

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- B. Surgeon General's Confronting Health Misinformation Advisory
- C. Preliminary Response to Referral No. 2021.16