

Health Equity Advisory Commission Meeting Draft Minutes

Date: June 2, 2026

Present

Commission Members: Andlea Brett, Ana Burke, Joanne Crawford, Kheya Ganguly, Mark Hughes, Monica Hutt, Jeff Mbarushimana, Kirsten Murphy, Breanna Sheehan, Tom Tench

Others: Kia’Rae Hanron, Kate Jerman, Catherine Johnston, Heather Michaud, Alison Segar, Katie Stetler

Agenda item	
Welcome and Introductions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The meeting began with round robin introductions.
Adoption of the Agenda	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The agenda was approved.
Approve Minutes of May 5, 2026 Meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Minutes will be revised with the changes requested by Mark and put on the next meeting agenda for approval.
Public Comment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Catherine Johnston, on behalf of the Flavors Hook Kids Vermont campaign, provided an update on bill S.198. The bill was unanimously passed through the Legislature and is pending signature by the Governor. She expressed appreciation for any and all support people are willing to give to ensure the bill is signed and placed into law. Alison Segar, on behalf of the Vermont Language Justice Project, asked for consideration of an alternative to the Vision, Mission & Values section of the HEAC website to include people with language access needs. She provided an update on bill S.243, which is also pending signature by the Governor. Alison thanked everyone who offered support for that bill over the last six months. Kia’Rae Hanron, owner of Kia’s Art Room, introduced herself and described her passion for using the arts as a tool to help individuals, organizations, and communities achieve their goals.
Updates Rural Health Transformation Program: Letter of Inquiry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The conversation focused on whether the commission should move forward with this draft letter HEAC Letter to AHS, VDH, DVHA. Commission members had been asked to review the letter with their organizations to determine whether they could support it. Support for the draft letter was mixed, with several commission members expressing concerns about signing the letter in its current form. Some state

employee commission members noted restrictions on participating in advocacy-oriented communications directed at state government due to their roles.

- There were concerns expressed that the letter focuses too heavily on requesting process details and information and whether this represents the best use of the commission's time and influence. There were further concerns that reviewing large amounts of documentation would require significant capacity and could delay more meaningful work.
- Suggestions were made to shift the commission's focus toward providing recommendations on how RHTP initiatives can better center equity, helping prevent disparate impacts in future funding rounds, and serving as an advisory partner in the next iteration of this process rather than requesting information after decisions have been made.
- Mark re-emphasized concerns that RHTP implementation could produce inequitable outcomes for black, indigenous, and other people of color, LGBTQ individuals, and people with disabilities. He feels obtaining additional information is necessary to make informed recommendations and better understand the state's role in making some of the determinations.
- There were acknowledgements that many challenges surrounding the RHTP stem from changing federal guidance and timelines.
- Following discussion, there was consensus to not move forward with the letter as written. There was agreement to return the letter to the subcommittee for revision and consider reframing it to focus more on recommendations and partnership, reduce emphasis on requests for documentation, and increase supportability among commission members and state agency representatives.
- Additional ideas for moving forward included reaching out to Jill Olson to offer assistance, developing recommendations for future funding cycles, including concerns and recommendations in the commission's next legislative report, and using the commission's own grant process through the Office of Health Equity to actively model equitable funding practices.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Despite differing opinions on strategy, commission members agreed that equity concerns pertaining to the RHTP remain important and deserve continued attention. • Mark expressed frustration that political considerations may be limiting the commission’s ability to fully exercise its statutory role of reviewing, monitoring, and advising on policies, procedures, practices and laws affecting historically marginalized populations. Despite those frustrations, he emphasized respect for the differing perspectives of commission members and a commitment to moving forward collaboratively.
Check-In from the Office of Health Equity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kate provided updates on community engagement, membership recruitment, onboarding, reporting requirements, and grant administration. The conversation centered on strengthening community participation, filling vacant commission seats, improving member onboarding, discussing staffing and reporting changes, and grant administration.
HEAC Legislative Assignments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monica provided an overview of recent legislative assignments to the HEAC HEAC Legislative Review - 2025-2026 Session. • Monica also suggested a collective call out to commission members and interested parties to ascertain what other legislation came through that people believe the HEAC should be paying attention to, followed by a future meeting agenda item for an assessment of bills that were passed that <i>have an impact on, should have an impact on, or will have an adverse impact on</i> the issues of health equity for the populations the HEAC is designated to support.
General Organizational and Community Updates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tabled by consensus.
Public Comment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alison Segar repeated concerns about who is not represented at the table – disadvantaged populations, people who do not speak English, etc. She stressed that meaningful participation requires making meetings and information more accessible to diverse populations. • Alison Segar inquired about grant opportunities for community organizations and how organizations can learn about available funding. Mark encouraged follow-up conversations and noted relevant RFPs were available. Kheya mentioned an RFP out right now or coming soon related to videos for language.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kia'Rae Hanron again offered her support, noting art-based approaches can be powerful tools for community outreach, communication, building understanding across different groups and creating connections between people and initiatives. • Catherine Johnston echoed concerns about moving beyond professional circles to engage community-based organizations more effectively. She highlighted the challenge of making participation truly accessible and expressed interest in continuing the conversation. • Catherine Johnston asked for help spreading the word that United Way Northwest Vermont is hiring three Vista volunteers to work in the area of prevention.
Take-Aways and Wrap-Up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Andlea suggested examining a cross-section of data related to discriminatory practices. The suggestion was acknowledged and noted for future consideration. • Breanna suggested that it be noted for the record, and also for the commission's next report to the Legislature, the fact that professional and state employees often face limitations on participating fully in advisory groups and commissions because of their employment roles. She said this should be documented as a limitation and explored further in future discussions. • Discussion of AHEAD model on the next meeting agenda. • Continued discussion re: RHTP at the subcommittee level with the hope of bringing back more palatable recommendations.
Adjourn	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The meeting adjourned at 2:00 p.m.

Minutes Approved: July 7, 2026