



STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA  
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

ROY COOPER  
GOVERNOR

KODY H. KINSLEY  
SECRETARY

SECRETARIAL DIRECTIVE 005

DATE: February 22, 2024

SUBJECT: Community and Partner Engagement

1. **SCOPE.** This Directive applies to all divisions, offices, facilities and units within the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services. The provisions of this Directive shall not be construed to interfere with or impede the authorities or duties prescribed by law to specific divisions, offices, facilities or units, or individuals within those units.
2. **BACKGROUND.** NCDHHS is dedicated to engaging communities meaningfully and systematically involving them in our policies, procedures and initiatives. We prioritize community involvement by providing accessible platforms for participation in key meetings, access to resources and opportunities to serve as advisors and subject matter experts. Our partner engagement process aims to unify efforts and enhance our focus, ensuring consistency across the Department and improving health outcomes for all North Carolinians. To achieve this, we commit to including the voices of those with lived experiences and affected communities. We build and sustain trust by developing authentic relationships with communities, accelerating community-led solutions and embedding community voices in policy development, planning, implementation and program evaluation.
3. **OBJECTIVES.** This Directive aims to accomplish the following objectives:
  - a. Engage partners and proactively operate in a systematic, community-driven approach that involves communities as SMEs to help inform on programs, services, strategy and policy.
  - b. Promote transparency, accountability and co-creation to build trust, identification of opportunities, manage expectations and collaborate with a diverse set of partners.
  - c. Provide web-based information (partner groups, meeting dates, materials, primary contacts) to make engagement more accessible.
  - d. Build capacity to enhance learning and resource-sharing and promote a change-oriented mindset to improve health outcomes within communities and sustain those partnerships.
  - e. Foster timely and accurate communication with communities and partners in a way that is clear and values the needs and beliefs of different groups. Use plain language for printed and written materials and information on websites.
  - f. Leverage health literacy as a tool to involve community members in message development and to understand and use health information for informed decisions.

- g. Gauge community readiness to actively engage in initiatives, utilize trusted leaders to ensure the well-being and sustainable development of the community and promote community self-determination.
  - h. Encourage effective cross-cultural work and community engagement by encompassing cultural humility, cultural sensitivity and cultural competency.
  - i. Focus on whole-person health with a proactive focus on people and populations that have been historically marginalized in community engagement and address the needs of communities that are not often connected to services and resources.
  - j. Promote inclusion in community engagement to make sure every person, regardless of background, identity, abilities or needs, is considered, treated fairly and given the same opportunities to access and benefit from services, resources and programs.
  - k. Build trust through community engagement activities with partners by utilizing trauma-informed approaches, historical awareness, policy considerations and respect for community dignity.
4. **RESPONSIBILITIES.** The following groups have a responsibility to ensure that they consult with those impacted or those with lived experiences on policy development, planning, implementation and evaluation of programs and services:
- a. **Deputy Secretaries.** Provide executive leadership across divisions to help advance the NCDHHS Community and Partner Engagement goals of building and sustaining trust and embedding community voices in policy development, planning, implementation and evaluation of programs and services. Employees should be evaluated annually to ensure accountability.
  - b. **Assistant Secretaries, Division Directors, Deputy Directors, Associate Directors.** Make sure every division/office has a plan to involve partners. People with lived experience should have an opportunity to advise. Division/office websites must have details on how partners can get involved, including contact info. Each unit must create a process to follow the Community and Partner Engagement Guide. Employees should be evaluated annually to ensure accountability.
  - c. **Business Leads, Managers (assigned to partners/groups or councils).** NCDHHS employees leading partner engagement must regularly update the NCDHHS Partner Engagements list. Updates should include information about the external groups or individuals that divisions/offices engage with at least annually or when changes occur in scope, membership, meeting frequency or point of contact.
  - d. **NCDHHS staff.** Familiarize yourself with the Community and Partner Engagement Guide and apply its principles when interacting with communities and partners. This involves becoming more culturally aware, engaging respectfully with people from diverse backgrounds and promptly addressing community and partner concerns.
5. **RESOURCES.**
- a. **Partner Engagement List.** NCDHHS employees are required to update the list of NCDHHS Partner Engagements with information about the external groups or individuals that divisions/offices engage with regularly (monthly or quarterly) that advise, inform or have an interest in divisional programmatic and/or policy work, including partnerships which are state or legislatively required and which support the development of policies, provide oversight and input on Departmental or divisional priorities.
    - i. Reporting requirements include the identification of partner groups, defined charters, division/office point of contact, meeting dates and details of upcoming and past meetings. Information should be updated monthly via the NCDHHS Partner Engagement Inventory.

- b. **Community and Partner Engagement Guide.** NCDHHS developed the Community and Partner Engagement Guide as a foundational resource and tactical playbook designed to unify NCDHHS' approach to community engagement. NCDHHS employees are directed to utilize the Guide and the Community and Partner Engagement Continuum contained therein to facilitate planning and engagement with partners and communities throughout the state. NCDHHS employees are encouraged to tailor engagement approaches based on the unique needs of the community, population or partners they serve. Each step of the continuum and detailed procedures and checklists can be found within the Community and Partner Engagement Guide located on the NCDHHS website at [www.ncdhhs.gov/community-and-partner-engagement](http://www.ncdhhs.gov/community-and-partner-engagement).

6. **AUTHORITIES.**

- a. N.C. Gen. Stat. § 143B-10

7. **OFFICE OF PRIMARY INTEREST.** Applies to all divisions/offices; led by the Health Equity Portfolio.
8. **SECRETARY AUTHORITY.** This Directive and any delegation of authority herein shall not deprive the Secretary of performing, in lieu of the Chief Deputy Secretary or any other named official, any of the acts set forth above. This delegation of authority may be amended or withdrawn by the Secretary at any time and without notice. This delegation of authority shall not apply to any actions which by law, regulation or Executive Order, may only be executed by the Secretary.

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Kody H. Kinsley

Secretary