

MDH POLICY

<https://health.maryland.gov/Pages/mdhpolicies.aspx>

OFFICE OF COMMUNICATIONS

MDH POLICY 01.04.02

Effective Date: September 9, 2021

SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Maryland Department of Health's (MDH) authority as Maryland's health agency is critical to promoting safety, preventing disease, and addressing many health needs — be they physical, mental, or social — for all Marylanders. Critical to MDH's mission are service, transparency and information accessibility. As communication is increasingly facilitated via the Internet and digital media, establishing guidelines for MDH messaging via social media platforms is essential.

This policy establishes guidelines for social media use including creation and management of information via MDH-affiliated social media accounts, including matters related to customer service.

This policy also is intended to help protect MDH and its employees from legal, credibility and other risks that may arise from posting information, engaging with social media users and participating in related online social media interaction as it relates to MDH.

Local health departments, boards and commissions are exempt from this policy.

II. BACKGROUND

MDH issued its original social media policy in March 2018. Prior to issuing the policy, the Office of Communications provided general guidelines and training to parties interested in creating and maintaining MDH-affiliated social media accounts.

This updated policy more clearly specifies professional social media use parameters, including account creation, maintenance and protocols for managing messaging related to customer service matters.

The policy also incorporates aspects of MDH's Brand Management Policy to ensure cohesive representation of MDH messaging both visually and verbally.

MDH POLICY 01.04.02
SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY
OFFICE OF COMMUNICATIONS

Finally, this policy expands the Office of Communications' role in administration and oversight of all MDH-affiliated social media accounts to help ensure posts serve not only specific programmatic objectives, but also those of the Department and the Office of the Governor.

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This version of MDH Policy 01.04.02 dated, August 9, 2021, replaces the earlier version dated March 26, 2018.

III. POLICY STATEMENTS

A. DEFINITIONS.

In this policy, the following terms have the meanings indicated.

1. **“Account designee”** means an individual the account manager designates as responsible for monitoring and maintaining MDH-affiliated social media in the account manager's absence.
2. **“Account manager”** means the person that is responsible for monitoring and maintaining MDH-affiliated social media content.
3. **“Brand”** means the specific experience (i.e., thoughts, feelings and behaviors) associated with a particular entity, service or product. Branding both identifies and distinguishes the particular entity, service or product from other entities, services or products in its sphere. The MDH brand is defined by the Office of the Governor and encompasses both government entity and service-oriented product, which together position MDH as the health and wellness partner for Maryland residents.
4. **“Department electronic resource”** means computers, mobile devices, wired and wireless devices, email, networks and bandwidth paid for by MDH, made available to employees to perform professional responsibilities on behalf of MDH.
5. **“Departmental social media activities”** means accessing or posting information to a social media site that is related to professional activities and responsibilities affiliated with MDH.

MDH POLICY 01.04.02
SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY
OFFICE OF COMMUNICATIONS

6. **“Hate speech”** means language that attacks, threatens or insults a person or group of people.
7. **“Hide comment”** means a comment on Facebook will only be visible to the person who wrote it and their Facebook friends.
8. **“Logo”** means a mark, symbol, or icon used to identify an organization; logos may or may not include text and/or type elements.
9. **“Media”** means any mode of communication (e.g., radio, television, newspaper, magazine, Internet, social media, etc.) that may reach or influence people widely.
10. **“Misinformation”** means incorrect or misleading information.
11. **“Obscene language”** means content repulsive by reason of its vulgar nature or disregard of moral and ethical principles.
12. **“Personal social media activities”** means accessing or posting information to a social media site that is not related to professional activities and responsibilities affiliated with MDH.
13. **“Plain language”** means language that makes it easier for the public to read, understand and use government communications.
14. **“Profanity filter”** means a mechanism that blocks specific words or phrases from appearing on a page.
15. **“Profile photo”** means the image that users see next to a name on social media platforms. This is how people recognize individual users.
16. **“Section 508 compliant”** means that content is accessible to people with disabilities, per amendments to the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.
17. **“Social media”** means forms of electronic communication such as websites for social networking and microblogging through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Tumblr, Instagram, Snap, Pinterest and LinkedIn).

MDH POLICY 01.04.02
SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY
OFFICE OF COMMUNICATIONS

18. **“Threat”** means an expression of intent to inflict harm, injury or damage.
19. **“Verified sources”** means an outlet for information that establishes truth, accuracy and reality. This includes academic, federal, State and local health agencies.
20. **“Visual identity”** means the logo, colors, type and imagery/graphics used to represent the MDH brand.

B. SOCIAL MEDIA COMMUNICATIONS.

1. DEPARTMENTAL ACCOUNT QUALIFICATIONS.

a. Standards.

- i. All MDH-affiliated social media accounts must abide by brand and visual identity standards set forth by the Governor’s Office of Communications.
- ii. All MDH-affiliated social media account titles must follow established naming conventions: Maryland Department of Health [Office/Program/Administration].
- iii. All MDH-affiliated social media account header imagery is at the discretion of the page manager but must reflect the page’s mission.
- iv. All MDH-affiliated social media accounts must utilize profile photos as specified by the Office of Communications.
- v. All MDH-affiliated social media accounts must be created using an official maryland.gov email address.
- vi. The MDH Office of Communications must be granted access as an account administrator upon creation.

b. Creation.

- i. All MDH-affiliated social media accounts should function as a digital extension of the services that MDH provides and should disseminate information useful to the general public — including health care resources, public health announcements, press releases, safety and preparedness information from federal, state and local partners, in addition to updates on departmental and statewide initiatives.
- ii. Entities that identify a need to create an official MDH affiliated social media account for their respective administration, office, program, initiative, etc. must first have written consent from the Office of Communications.
- iii. Requests to create any MDH-affiliated social media account must be submitted in writing to the Office of Communications and must include:
 - A description of the administration, office, program, initiative, etc. including its mission;
 - Objectives to achieve through social media outreach;
 - List of proposed social media platform(s), including justification and proposed content for each;
 - Audience identification;
 - Strategic overview of content to be posted;
 - Anticipated frequency of messaging;
 - Plan and process for monitoring discussions and responding to messages;
 - Account manager and designee(s) identification; and
 - Proposed plan for Section 508 compliance.

c. Restrictions.

- i. Activity on MDH-affiliated social media platforms may only be facilitated by identified account managers or their designee(s).

- ii. Account approval is at the discretion of the Office of Communications.
- iii. Prior to account approval, proposed social media managers must undergo social media training as provided by the Office of Communications.

2. DEPARTMENTAL ACCOUNT MAINTENANCE.

a. Standards.

- i. Social media accounts must remain active, posting three times per week at minimum and responding to constituents when appropriate.
- ii. Profanity filters must be turned on within page settings.
- iii. The Office of Communications reserves the right to act on behalf of any MDH-affiliated social media account in the event that the account manager or their designee(s) are unable to do so in a timely manner.

b. Restrictions.

- i. Comments posted to MDH-affiliated social media accounts may not be deleted. If a comment contains obscene language, hate speech or could be perceived as a threat, the comment may be hidden (note: this option is only available on Facebook).
- ii. Removal of content from any MDH-affiliated social media account must be handled transparently, in good faith and in consultation with the Office of Communications.
- iii. Accounts must be maintained by the identified account manager or their designee(s).
- iv. Accounts may not grant or employ third-party access (e.g., advertiser access) to facilitate posting, except under specifically defined circumstances and

with written consent from the Office of Communications.

3. DEPARTMENTAL SOCIAL MEDIA ACTIVITY.

a. Standards.

- i. All social media content must be consistent with the Administration and MDH Secretary's broader messaging priorities.
- ii. All social media content must be consistent with MDH brand standards.
- iii. Imagery must project quality and professionalism and must support messaging for the content of the media to which it is applied.
- iv. Use of the MDH logo must first be approved by the Office of Communications.
- v. All social media posts must be accurate, timely, and compliant with Section 508 accessibility standards to the greatest extent possible.
- vi. All social media posts must be written using plain language.
- vii. All social media content must cite sources of information as appropriate and may only share content from verified sources including academic, federal, state and local partners.
- viii. With the exception of MDH employees, subjects featured in MDH-produced social media content must provide documented consent that is both obtained and retained by the administration, office or program affiliated with the particular post for as long as the content remains in circulation.

b. Messaging protocol.

- i. Employees may engage with constituents via MDH-affiliated social media accounts publicly in a positive manner; posts must use sound judgment and good faith in ensuring the integrity of both the Administration and MDH Secretary's broader messaging.
- ii. If contacted publicly via social media concerning matters of customer service, respond courteously and within 48 hours, asking for contact information via private messaging methods (e.g., via chat or direct messaging); specify that only contact information is required.
- iii. If contacted privately via social media (e.g., via chat or direct messaging) concerning matters of customer service, respond courteously and within 48 hours, asking for contact information; specify that only contact information is required.
- iv. The account manager or their designee shall send contact information, along with screen shots of the message, the date the message was received and the platform from which it came to <https://health.maryland.gov/Pages/contactus.aspx>.
- v. The account manager or their designee shall report any harassment, hate speech or otherwise antagonistic comments, messaging or content to the Office of Communications for review.
- vi. Media inquiries received via social media platforms must be referred to the Office of Communications for response within 24 hours.

c. Restrictions.

- i. Social media posts or private messaging may never contain information that identifies Non-public Personal Information (NPI) or any information that may be damaging, disparaging, defamatory, libelous or otherwise insensitive or offensive.
- ii. Social media posts may never refer to information about any lawsuit, regulatory action, formal legal proceeding or personnel matters to which MDH or its designees are party.
- iii. Social media posts may not demonstrate political partisan bias and may not be used in any political capacity, including, but not limited to, for political party purposes or for campaign purposes.
- iv. Live streaming content is prohibited without written consent from the Office of Communications.
- v. Posting of YouTube content is prohibited without written consent from the Office of Communications.
- vi. Any long-form content (e.g., blog posts, press releases or opinion pieces) must be reviewed and approved by the Office of Communications prior to posting.
- vii. Any advertising or paid social media content, including placement strategy, must be reviewed and approved by the Office of Communications.
- viii. Response(s) to antagonistic messaging or content that is intended to spread misinformation is prohibited without first contacting the Office of Communications.

- ix. Use of internal MDH acronyms is to be avoided.
- x. Use of hashtags that are not immediately clear and decipherable to the general public is to be avoided.

d. Disciplinary Action.

- i. Employees that witness: 1) misuse of Department-related social media; 2) misuse of Department electronic resources; or 3) intentional misrepresentation of the Department by employees via social media should report the incident to the Office of Communications immediately.
- ii. Employees in violation of this policy may be required to edit or remove the content in question.
- iii. Employees in violation of this policy may be subject to other disciplinary action as appropriate, up to and including termination of employment (per COMAR 17.04.05.04).

3. PERSONAL SOCIAL MEDIA ACTIVITY.

a. Standards.

- i. Employees must use a personal email address, not an MDH email address, for personal social media activities.
- ii. Employees are personally responsible for any social media posts to personal accounts.
- iii. Employees are expected to follow all applicable laws and regulations governing social media use.

b. Restrictions.

- i. Employees may not use social media for personal reasons during work time.

MDH POLICY 01.04.02
SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY
OFFICE OF COMMUNICATIONS

- ii. Employees may not post to personal social media accounts using MDH electronic resources.
- iii. Employees may not create the impression that they represent the opinion of or the position of MDH in any personal social media posts.

IV. REFERENCES

- Merriam-Webster.com
<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/social%20mediafair-use/more-info.html>
- Federal Plain Language Guidelines
<https://plainlanguage.gov/guidelines/>
- Dictionary.com
<http://www.dictionary.com/browse/media?s=t>
- Maryland Department of Health Social Media Policy (2018)
<https://health.maryland.gov/dhmh/01.04.02%20MDH%20Social%20Media%20Policy%20%20%203-26-18.pdf>

APPROVED:



Dennis R. Schrader, Secretary

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