



OFFICE OF COMMUNICATIONS

MDH POLICY 01.04.04
Effective Date: June 28, 2018

MEDIA INQUIRY MANAGEMENT POLICY

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Maryland Department of Health (MDH) must provide accurate and consistent information both to the public and to the media. In order for effective and timely communication to occur, the Office of Communications must be informed proactively about issues or incidents that may attract media attention.

This policy establishes guidelines for management of the media inquiry process. This policy enables the Office of Communications to respond in a timely manner and establishes consistency regarding matters of MDH or Administration policy as a means to coordinate response and communication throughout the Department.

II. BACKGROUND

Communicating with the media, including both proactive communications and responding to media inquiries, is a critical component of the MDH mission.

When appropriate, responsibility for speaking on behalf of the Department will be assigned, through the Office of Communications, to staff members whose particular expertise is needed to provide more specific or specialized information or technical support.

III. POLICY STATEMENTS

A. DEFINITIONS.

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

1. **“Media”** means any mode of communication (e.g., radio, television, newspaper, magazine, Internet, social media, etc.) that may reach or influence people widely.

2. **"Proactive communication"** means communication that is serving to prepare for, to intervene in, or to control an expected occurrence or situation; especially a situation that has potential to be misunderstood.

3. **"Subject matter expert"** means a person, designated by the Administration and/or Secretary and/or Deputy Secretary and/or the Office of Communications, who has special skill, knowledge, or authority in a particular field or subject matter.

B. MEDIA INQUIRIES.

1. PROTOCOL.

a. Roles.

i. The Office of Communications is the media inquiry response manager;

ii. The Secretary is the Department's chief spokesperson;

iii. When appropriate, responsibility for speaking on behalf of the Department will be assigned to subject matter experts to provide specialized information or technical support.

b. General Protocol.

i. If contacted by the media, ascertain the issue, advise that an appropriate party will make contact, and immediately forward the inquiry to both the Director and Deputy Director of the Office of Communications via email, including subject, any specific questions, deadline, and contact information.

ii. In concert with Administration and/or Department leadership, et. al., the Office of Communications will determine what, if any, information will be released, by whom, and in what format.

iii. The Office of Communications will contact the appropriate subject matter expert(s), copying the respective Administration, Office, and/or Program.

iv. Health professional boards, commissions, and local health departments are asked to provide follow-up information to the Office of Communications when appropriate. The Office of Communications Director and Deputy Director should be on distribution lists for Press Releases.

2. SUBJECT MATTER EXPERTS.

a. Response Process.

i. Determining the appropriate subject matter expert to respond to a particular media inquiry will be based on the particular subject matter; special skill, knowledge, or authority; and availability.

ii. When an interview is deemed appropriate, the Office of Communications will facilitate with the appropriate subject matter expert serving as the interviewee.

iii. For all other media inquiries, the Office of Communications will forward the inquiry, including response deadline, to the subject matter expert;

iii. The subject matter expert is responsible for drafting a written response;

iv. The subject matter expert is responsible for sending the draft response back to the Office of Communications;

iv. The Office of Communications will edit the draft response, will gain approval for the final draft, and will send the final response to the media contact directly, with copies to the appropriate Departmental employees.

v. In the event that a response within the stated deadline is not possible, the subject matter expert must notify the Office of Communications as soon as possible.

b. Timely Response.

i. Subject matter experts are expected to acknowledge the receipt of the request from the Office of Communications within 24 hours and to provide an estimated delivery date for the draft response.

- ii. If the identified subject matter expert is not responsive to the Office of Communications within 24 hours, the Administration, Department leadership, et. al. will be responsible for coordination with the Office of Communications to determine how the inquiry will be answered.

3. OTHER MEDIA INTERACTION.

a. Public Information Act.

- i. For particularly large records requests or those potentially containing sensitive or private information, a Public Information Act (PIA) request may be required from the media contact to initiate a formal review process.
- ii. In the event that a PIA request might be necessary, notify both the Office of Communications and mdh.pia@maryland.gov as soon as possible.
- iii. After a PIA request is determined to be appropriate, the Office of Communications will notify the media contact that a PIA request is required.

b. Press Releases.

- i. Programs are encouraged to use the Office of Communications as a resource for assistance in drafting media content, including press releases.
- ii. Programs may not issue press releases independently; only the Office of Communications may issue a press release.
- iii. Press releases and/or information for a press release must be sent to the Office of Communications at least two weeks prior to the intended dissemination date.

c. Media Events.

- i. Programs are encouraged to use the Office of Communications as a resource for assistance in drafting media content, including for social media or pre-planned media events.

- ii. Programs must contact the Office of Communications regarding information intended to be disseminated via social media or a media event at least two weeks prior to the intended event date.

IV. REFERENCES

- Dictionary.com
<http://www.dictionary.com/browse/expert?s=t>
<http://www.dictionary.com/browse/media?s=t>
<http://www.dictionary.com/browse/proactive?s=t>
- Maryland Department of Health PIA Policy
<https://health.maryland.gov/docs/p01.04.01.pdf>
- Maryland Department of Health Social Media Policy
<https://health.maryland.gov/dhmh/01.04.02%20MDH%20Social%20Media%20Policy%20-%20%203-26-18.pdf>

APPROVED:



Robert R. Neall, Secretary

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