



STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA  
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

ROY COOPER  
GOVERNOR

MANDY COHEN, MD, MPH  
SECRETARY

April 15, 2021

Dear NCDHHS Partners and Stakeholders:

For more than a year, we have been working in partnership with urgency and purpose to slow the spread of COVID-19, address inequities exacerbated by the pandemic, and work towards recovery.

As with all crises, we have learned important lessons from the events of the past year that we at the Department are acting upon so that we can build on our new way of working together to fulfill our mission and move into a new future together. Below I outline five major changes to our organizational structure that will be in place by July 1, 2021.

### 1. Health Equity

The pandemic exposed the disproportionate impact of crisis on communities of color resulting from generational impacts of systemic racism and structural disadvantage. It is not accidental that historically marginalized populations were disproportionately impacted by this pandemic, as they are in hurricanes, economic downturns, and other periods of vulnerability.

To continue to embed equity in every aspect of our work, we are creating a new leadership position and recruiting a **Chief Health Equity Officer**. In addition to leading cross department work on equity, the Chief Health Equity Officer will oversee an expanded Office of Health Equity (formerly the Office of Minority Health) and the Office of Rural Health.

### 2. Whole-Person Health

The COVID crisis spotlighted how non-medical drivers of health, like the ability to safely quarantine and be able to put food on the table or live in stable non-congregate housing, impact both individual and community health. We saw how vital access to mental health support is for people. And, we saw how fragile food security and emotional well-being is when children cannot go to school for long periods of time and how fragile housing stability is when parents are out of work. The pandemic reinforced the need to accelerate the Department's work to build a strong, unified health and human services infrastructure that focuses on whole-person health.

- To that end, we are further aligning DHHS divisions and programs. **Susan Gale Perry** will serve as **Chief Deputy Secretary for Opportunity and Well-Being** overseeing programs and policies that promote the economic and social well-being of families, children, individuals and communities across North Carolina, including: Divisions of Child Development and Early Education and new Child and Family Well Being, Office of Healthy Opportunities; Divisions supporting Employment Inclusion and Economic Stability led by Deputy Secretary Tara Myers which are Aging and Adult Services, Disability Determination Services, Services for the Blind, Services for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, Social Services and Vocational

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Rehabilitation Services as well as the NC Council on Developmental Disabilities and Office of Economic Opportunity. **Kody Kinsley** will serve as **Chief Deputy Secretary for Health**, overseeing programs and policies that foster the whole-person health of North Carolinians, including: Divisions of Public Health; Mental Health, Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, and Substance Use Disorders; Health Service Regulation; State Operated Healthcare Facilities and the new Office of Emergency Preparedness, Response, and Recovery.

### **3. Children and Families**

Children and families often bear the brunt during times of adversity. North Carolina must build on the state's early childhood action plan and work to support children's healthy development and family well-being across the continuum of their experiences and environments.

We are establishing a **new division of Child and Family Well-Being** to elevate and coordinate the critical work of supporting our children and families. This division will work to ensure that North Carolina's children grow up safe, healthy and thriving in nurturing and resilient families and communities. It will bring together complimentary programs from the Divisions of Public Health, Mental Health, and Social Services to maximize services and outcomes for children and their families, including all child nutrition programs (WIC, SNAP and CACFP), the full range of prevention services for children beginning at birth, children's mental health services, and early intervention programs. We will be recruiting a new leader to oversee this division.

### **4. Preparedness, Response and Recovery**

This past year we have accomplished so much together by breaking out of siloed structures and working together in new ways toward shared goals.

We are **establishing an Office of Emergency Preparedness, Response, and Recovery** to bring together teams from across the Department to prepare for, respond to, and recover from disasters and health emergencies affecting North Carolina. This new office will strengthen and streamline our coordination and partnership with the Division of Emergency Management at the Department of Public Safety. Our ongoing COVID-19 pandemic response will be led by this office. We will be recruiting a new leader for this office.

### **5. Transparency and Accountability**

Transparent communications and authentic engagement of stakeholders and those impacted by our work is vital to achieving the best outcomes for North Carolinians. Likewise, operational excellence is best achieved by integrating accountability, performance management and quality improvement in all aspects of how we do business.

I am pleased to welcome **Dr. Cardra Burns** as our new **Deputy Secretary for Operational Excellence** and **Tracy Zimmerman** as our new **Deputy Secretary for Policy, Strategy and External Engagement**.

- Dr. Burns is the current Deputy Director in the Division of Public Health and has worked in public health for 18 years in both Georgia and North Carolina. She is currently the Senior Deputy Director for NC DHHS-Division of Public Health. Dr. Burns is also an Associate Professor with Baker College and Ashford University. Dr. Burns holds a Bachelor of Science in Nutrition/Food Science from Georgia Southern University, a Master of Business Administration from Webster University, a Master of Public Administration, and a Doctorate in Business Administration with a specialization in Information Systems Management, both from Walden University. Also, she is a certified lactation counselor. Dr. Burns will oversee Human Resources, Information Technology, Procurement, a new office of Performance Management, Budget and the Controller's Office, Internal Audit, Property and Construction.

- Tracy Zimmerman currently serves as our Senior Director of External Affairs and has led communications throughout the pandemic. Tracy has more than 25 years of experience working on behalf of public interest issues. Prior to joining DHHS, she helped found the North Carolina Early Childhood Foundation and served as its Executive Director. Her public engagement efforts have been nationally recognized, and she has created award-winning public health campaigns. She will oversee policy, legislative affairs, communications, data analytics, and the legal office.

Finally, it is with mixed emotions that I announce that Ben Money will be leaving his role as Deputy Secretary for Health Services in June for a new leadership opportunity with the National Association of Community Health Centers. I am incredibly grateful for Ben's service to the Department and our mission and goals, particularly throughout this pandemic. His impact on our Department and our health equity work have been profound and he will be greatly missed.

As we move into recovery and building a healthier North Carolina, I look forward to our continued partnership.

Best,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mandy K. Cohen". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of each name being capitalized and prominent.

Mandy K. Cohen, MD, MPH  
Secretary