



FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

CENTRAL OFFICE'S COMMUNICATION
OF GUIDANCE AND INFORMATION TO
COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENTS

Report # A-1920-001 • March 20, 2020

Purpose of this project:

We wanted to determine whether Central Office uniformly and timely communicates publicized updates and changes to policies, procedures, forms and other important information to county health departments (CHD), to ensure the Department of Health's (Department) communication is as seamless as possible.

What we reviewed:

We reviewed the Department's process for communicating information to its CHDs.

Summary of results:

Management should address two identified issues:

- Communication can be improved to increase employee access to sufficient, consistent and timely information regarding internal priorities, actions, plans and special situations.
- The Office of Communications' policy should be updated.

Additional details follow below. Management's response is in **Appendix A**.

DETAILED RESULTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Department is large, with more than 13,000 employees, plus contracted staff working in multiple locations in each of Florida's 67 counties. Effective communication and distribution of information is inherently a challenge.

The Department's communication process of pertinent information being disseminated has many strengths. Management we interviewed and documentation we examined identified some of these as:

- The Office of Communications' *Brand & Content Standards* and *Florida Health Highlights, Guidance for Writing Stories*.
- The current established processes of reviewing and approving policies, procedures and pertinent information distributed to CHDs.
- Office of County Health Systems' bi-weekly phone calls with CHDs.

Our audit identified the following opportunities for improving effectiveness and efficiencies in operations:

Primary communication sources utilized.

- Department procedure in DOHP 85-01-13, *Communications Policy*, explains “Employee communications shall be timely, open and collaborative in informing and motivating employees to become ambassadors of health. In order to increase employee access to sufficient, consistent and timely information regarding internal priorities, actions, plans and special situations, the Department periodically sends out [Department] Bulletins, posts key messaging on the intranet, and delivers stand-alone email memos.”
- The Department’s primary vehicles of electronic communication include email, email distribution lists, SharePoint, and InsideFLHealth, which is the Department’s intranet website. Verbal communication with CHDs includes Office of County Health Systems’ bi-weekly conference calls, Division of Administration’s weekly conference calls, and Consortia meetings.
- Although information and notifications are distributed from Central Office to CHD management, one challenge is that the information is not always further distributed to those who need to know among CHD staff. One health officer explained that a challenge is to ensure staff throughout a CHD reads and acknowledges receipt of new information when it is sent.
- The Department does not currently use social media to communicate information interoffice. Utilizing social media could help with the challenging effects of instant communication among Central Office and CHDs, especially important during public health emergencies.
- InsideFLHealth could be more of a useful tool to communicate pertinent changes, if used to its fullest technological potential.
- Effective communication is a two-way process of exchanging information. Good communication involves not only Central Office communicating policy and directives to CHD management and staff. It should also include an open forum for listening and hearing the concerns and needs of those working in the CHDs.
- Management we interviewed expressed the need for a consistent, more effective and timely communication strategy that would be beneficial for all Department employees. Management provided comments to improve the communication in the Department. Please see **Exhibit 1** to review the mutual-themed comments expressed by management for improving timely communication of pertinent communication to CHDs and within the Department.

We recommend the Office of Communications collaborate with management in the Department's Office of County Health Systems, selected county health officers, and representatives from the different divisions, bureaus, and offices, perhaps through an ongoing taskforce, to research ways to improve communication of important information and implement the updates to a new, improved and joint communication strategy.

Policy update of internal procedure.

- Department procedure, IOP 5-2-16, *Policies and Procedure Management*, requires policy owners to review policies and procedures at least once every two years.
- The Office of Communications' policy, DOHP 85-01-13, *Communications Policy*, was last updated September 18, 2013.
- Periodic reviews and updates of Department policies and procedures helps minimize risk, ensure the Department is compliant with law, and assists the Department in operating efficiently.

We recommend the Office of Communications update its Communications Policy, DOHP 85-01.

SUPPLEMENTAL INFORMATION

Section 20.055, *Florida Statutes*, charges the Department's Office of Inspector General with responsibility to provide a central point for coordination of activities that promote accountability, integrity, and efficiency in government.

Danielle Myrick, Senior Management Analyst II, conducted the audit under the supervision of Mark H. Boehmer, CPA, Director of Auditing.

Our methodology included reviewing applicable policies and procedures and supporting documentation. We interviewed 12 key personnel at Central Office and CHDs familiar with how information is collected, sent out and how that information is received, including management in Central Office's Office of County Health Systems, available Deputy Secretaries; General Counsel; Office of Communications staff, Director of Division of Administration, and selected CHD health officers. A common theme among all those interviewed was that there could be stronger connections and relationships between Central Office and the CHDs.

This audit was conducted in conformance with *International Standards for the Professional Practice of Internal Auditing*, issued by the Institute of Internal Auditors, as provided by Section 20.055(6)(a), *Florida Statutes*, and as recommended by Quality Standards for Audits by Offices of Inspector General (*Principles and Standards for Offices of Inspectors General*, Association of Inspectors General).

We want to thank management in the Department for the information they provided, and for their cooperation throughout the project.

Copies of all final reports are available on our website at www.floridahealth.gov (search: internal audit). If you have questions or comments, please contact us by the following means:

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EXHIBIT 1

Department Communications' Opportunities for Improvement

1.	Assign Communication Liaisons in the Department's divisions, bureau, offices and CHDs, or utilize Program Councils to assist disseminating pertinent information.
2.	Periodically and consistently send Department bulletins or newsletters of updates of policies, procedures or other important information.
3.	Ensure to incorporate feedback, input and address concerns of management at both Central Office and the CHDs when new information is communicated and implemented.
4.	Collaborate with the Bureau of Personnel and Human Resource Management to ensure new managers of the Department are provided historical pertinent information to minimize the communication gap.
5.	Use InsideFLHealth and social media as a form of communication both at Central Office and the CHDs.
6.	The use of distribution lists does not guarantee the correct Department employees will receive the needed information if the distribution list is not periodically updated.
7.	Establish the Office of Communications as an office that provides continual and timely updated policies, procedures and important information.

APPENDIX A: MANAGEMENT RESPONSE

	Recommendation	Management Response
1	<p><i>We recommend the Office of Communications collaborate with management in the Department’s Office of County Health Systems, selected county health officers, and representatives from the different divisions, bureaus, and offices, perhaps through an ongoing taskforce, to research ways to improve communication of important information and implement the updates to a new, improved and joint communication strategy.</i></p>	<p>We concur.</p> <p>The Office of Communications’ Director is a participant at the Executive Leadership meetings. Information shared during the meetings that is relevant for Department employees is relayed to the Office of Communications’ Internal Communications Manager, who then disseminates to Department employees using email and InsideFLHealth intranet.</p> <p>Currently, each CHD has a Public Information Officer (PIO) that serves as a media resource. The Office of Communications maintains a recurring bi-weekly state-wide conference call with the PIOs and a bi-weekly writing lab for PIOs and health educators.</p> <p>The Communications Policy that is currently being updated will include verbiage that will formalize a workgroup. The workgroup will consist of leaders and employees from across the Department that will monitor the effectiveness of current communications with Department employees and maintain a current Communications Policy.</p> <p><i>Anticipated Completion Date:</i> September 30, 2020</p>
2	<p><i>We recommend the Office of Communications update its Communications Policy, DOHP 85-01.</i></p>	<p>We concur.</p> <p>The Office of Communications has prepared an updated draft policy for the Department that reflects technical and other substantial changes, specifically, Division names and components related to the Department’s upcoming public health reaccreditation. The updated draft will be finalized upon final processing of reaccreditation.</p> <p><i>Anticipated Completion Date:</i> September 30, 2020</p>