

Administrative Policy No. 2.08

Subject: Media Relations Policy

Related Policies: [AP 2.07, Visual Communications;](#)
[AP 2.11 Plain Talk;](#)
[AP 2.12, Photography and Video Imaging at DSHS facilities;](#)
[AP 15.24, Social Media;](#)
[AP 15.18.1, Content and Visual Design Standards for Internet Websites and Public-Facing Web Applications](#)

Information Contact: Senior Director, Office of Communications
MS 45100, (360) 902-8007

Authorizing Source: Office of Communications,
Office of the Secretary

Effective Date: April 1, 1989

Revised: November 4, 2019

Approved By: ORIGINAL SIGNED BY LORI MELCHIROI
Senior Director, Office of Policy and Rules

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to:

- A. Ensure the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) engages in proactive and effective media relations and responds to media inquiries in ways that uphold and further the DSHS mission of transforming lives.
- B. Ensure DSHS supports and delivers understandable, professional information that meets media deadlines.
- C. Ensure DSHS employees understand and follow policies and procedures established by the Office of Communications for media relations.
- D. Ensure Office of Communications staff have sufficient time and information to draft and seek input on and approval for news releases, statements, and advisories.

- E. Ensure designated staff are prepared to serve as agency, administration, division, or program spokespersons.
- F. Ensure media relations materials meet department branding standards, are written in plain talk, and align with the agency's mission, vision, goals, and priorities.
- G. Ensure understanding that all contracted marketing materials or external information tailored to the media is property of DSHS. As such, materials must be approved by and distributed in coordination with the Office of Communications.

Scope

This policy applies to:

- Any DSHS employee, contractor or volunteer who receives an inquiry from the media or who is approached by a member of the media.
- All department staff, in all administrations, divisions and programs that develop news releases, statements and advisories for news media.

Definitions

- **DSHS employees** are full-time or part-time department employees.
- **The Office of Communications**, consists of media Relations, Visual Communications and the Web Services Unit.
- **Media relations staff** are responsible for dissemination of information about the Department and its administrations and programs to the news media, through social media and through the Department website, and for facilitating media access to DSHS residential facilities and to public events sponsored by the Department and its administrations.
- **Social media** is any web-based technology that enables and facilitates rapid communication and/or networking through the Internet and/or cellular networks for mobile devices. Examples of social media include, but are not limited to, Twitter, Facebook and YouTube. The Department has a detailed [social media policy](#) (AP 15.24).
- **Visual Communications** designs and produces agency publications, brochures and other materials for external audiences. Information relating to this is found in [Administrative Policy 2.07](#)
- **Web Services** is responsible for design and maintenance of the DSHS external website.
- **Branding standards** are found in the [DSHS Branding Standards and Style Guide](#) and include the use of the DSHS logo, approved fonts for agency publications, templates and related materials.

Policy Requirements

- A. The DSHS Office of Communications will be responsive to news media requesting information and to administrations requesting assistance in responding to news media.
- B. The Office of Communications will assign a media relations manager to each administration who will work with the administration on external communications, including news releases, statements, advisories, social media messages and presentations. Administrations may ask their media relations managers for advice and assistance on communications internal to their administrations, especially those that may draw media attention.
- C. Office of Communications staff will work with the Department Secretary, senior leadership and assistant secretaries or their designees to develop the content of messaging for DSHS external communications, to include bullet points, statements, news releases, fact sheets and other products.
- D. In consultation with the Office of Communications, the Department Secretary and assistant secretaries may designate a representative to speak to the media on their behalf. Individuals designated to speak to the media must have taken the media relations course offered by the DSHS Office of Communications or work directly with Office of Communications staff on messaging, including, if needed, a mock interview to prepare for media questions. Course dates and registration for media relations training are available through the [Learning Management System](#).

Process for responding to media inquiries

Roles and responsibilities

A) DSHS employees, contractors and volunteers

Any DSHS employee, contractor or volunteer contacted by the news or social media will immediately, and before responding to any media request, notify their supervisor and the Office of Communications and provide information on the contact. Failure to comply with the requirements of this policy may result in disciplinary action up to and including discharge from employment.

B) Office of Communications staff

Office of Communications staff will contact the reporter to determine information needs and deadlines

The media relations manager will notify the DSHS secretary, the applicable assistant secretary, the chief of staff, other executive-level management as appropriate and the Office of Communications senior director that the request has been received. The notification should

include the deadline for meeting the request.

Office of Communications staff will also contact the Governor's Communications Office as needed.

The Office of Communications staff will work with administrations to draft responses to the media, which will be approved by the assistant secretary or designee. An Office of Communications staff member or an administration staff member designated by an assistant secretary as a contact person will be available to answer media requests for additional information.

Public records requests

Public records requests must be referred to the department's [Public Disclosure Unit](#).

Media relations managers will review public disclosure materials related to their administrations that are provided to the media through public records requests before the materials are disseminated to a news organization.

DSHS Official