

Administrative Policy No. 2.08

Subject:	Communications and Media Relations Policy
Related Policies:	AP 2.07, Visual Communications; AP 2.11, Plain Language; 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 and Government Affairs MS 45100, (360) 902-8007
Authorizing Source:	Office of Communications, Office of the Secretary
Effective Date:	April 1, 1989
Revised:	February 21, 2024
Approved By:	<u>Original signed by Pearlette J. Ramos</u> Senior Director, Office of Justice & Civil Rights

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to 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.
- Supports and delivers understandable, professional information that meets media deadlines.
- Employees are aware of and follow policies and procedures established by the office of communications and government affairs for media relations.
- Office of communications and government affairs staff have sufficient time and information to draft and seek input on and approval for news releases, statements, and advisories.
- Designated staff are prepared to serve as agency, administration, division, or

program spokespersons.

- Media relations materials meet DSHS branding standards, are written in plain language, and align with the agency's mission, vision, goals, and priorities.
- Understanding that all contracted marketing materials or external information tailored to the media are the property of DSHS. As such, materials must be approved by and distributed in coordination with the office of communications and government affairs.
- External communications products meet agency branding standards, as defined below, are written in [Plain Language](#), and align with the agency's mission, vision, values, and priorities.

Scope

This policy applies to:

- DSHS employees, contractors, or volunteers who receive an inquiry from the media or who are approached by a member of the media.
- DSHS staff in all administrations, divisions and programs who develop news releases, statements, and advisories for media.
- DSHS staff in all administrations, divisions, and programs who develop visual communications products for distribution to all external audiences.
- Work done by outside parties, including contractors and vendors, with whom we partner to produce visual communications products.

Definitions

- **DSHS employees** are full-time or part-time DSHS employees.
- **The office of communications** and government affairs consists of media relations and the web services unit.
- **Media relations staff** are responsible for dissemination of information about DSHS and its administrations and programs to the media, through social media and through the DSHS website, and for facilitating media access to DSHS residential facilities and to public events sponsored by DSHS and its administrations.
- **Media** are the communication outlets or tools used to store and deliver information or data.
- **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, X/ Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube. DSHS has a detailed [social media policy](#) (AP 15.24).
- **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.
- **Editorial standards** are practices adopted by the office of communications and government affairs and used to develop clear, concise, and consistent written content

for DSHS publications. Editorial standards include the [DSHS Branding Standards and Style Guide](#) current principles of grammar, usage, capitalization, punctuation, reading level, and plain language as defined by Executive Order [23-02](#).

- **External audiences** include the Governor's Office, tribal governments, legislators and legislative staff, state agencies other than DSHS, local governments, DSHS clients, vendors and contractors that do business with DSHS, community groups, and members of the general public.

Policy Requirements

- A. The DSHS office of communications and government affairs will be responsive to media requesting information. The media relations manager will work with administrations to gather information for response to media. Public record requests by the media will be processed through the public records unit.
- B. The office of communications and government affairs 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 and government affairs staff will work with the DSHS 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 and government affairs, the 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 and government affairs or work directly with administrations 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 Center](#).
- E. Media relations staff are responsible for dissemination of information about DSHS and its administrations and programs to the media, through social media, through the DSHS website, and for facilitating media access to DSHS residential facilities and to public events sponsored by DSHS and its administrations.
- F. Visual communications unit designs and produces agency publications, brochures, and other materials for external audiences. Information relating to this is found in [Administrative Policy 2.07](#)

- G. The web services unit is responsible for design and maintenance of the DSHS external website.

Process for responding to media inquiries.

Roles and responsibilities

A. DSHS employees, contractors, and volunteers.

1. 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 government affairs and provide information on the contact.

B. Office of Communications and Government Affairs staff.

1. Office of communications and government affairs staff will communicate with the media contact to determine information needs and deadlines.
2. 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.
3. Office of communications and government affairs staff will also contact the Governor's communications office as needed.
4. The office of communications and government affairs staff will work with administrations to draft responses to the media, which will be approved by the assistant secretary or designee.
5. An office of communications and government affairs staff member or an administration staff member designated by an assistant secretary will be available to answer media requests for additional information.

C. Process for responding to public records requests.

1. Public records requests must be referred to DSHS's [Public Disclosure Unit](#).
2. 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.

3. Failure to comply with the requirements of this policy may result in disciplinary action up to and including discharge from employment.

Resources

- DSHS [AP 2.07, Visual Communications](#);
- DSHS [AP 2.11 Plain Language](#).
- DSHS [AP 2.12, Photography and Video Imaging at DSHS facilities](#);
- DSHS [AP 15.24, Social Media](#);
- DSHS [AP 15.18.1, Content and Visual Design Standards for Internet Websites and Public-Facing Web Applications](#)
- [DSHS Branding Standards and Style Guide](#)
- [Executive Order 23-02 Plain Language](#)