



Administrative Policy No. 15.24

Subject: Social Media Policy

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Authorizing Source: Office of Communications and Government Affairs

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Approved By: Original approved by Pearlette J. Ramos
Senior Director, Office of Justice and Civil Rights

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to establish specific guidelines for the creation of social media sites and the authorized business use of social media by Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) employees. DSHS views social media as an opportunity to enhance communication among clients, stakeholders, partners, employees, legislators, and the public. An agency social media presence demonstrates that DSHS values and supports an informed, inspired, and engaged community and staff through building positive public awareness and strengthening dialogue.

Scope

This policy establishes DSHS' position on the use of social media and the approval process DSHS employees must follow before accessing or developing sites or using social media for DSHS business purposes.

Additional Guidance and Resources

Websites & web applications

[AP 18.26 Disability reasonable accommodation](#)

[AP 7.02 Equal access to services for individuals with disabilities](#)

[AP 18.66 Discrimination, harassment and other inappropriate behaviors](#)

[AP 15.10 Information security](#)

[AP 5.01 Privacy policy safeguarding confidential information](#)

[AP 18.64 Standards of ethical conduct for employees](#)

[AP 18.91 Use of resources](#)

[AP 5.03 Client rights relating to protected health information](#)

Definitions

Social media: This umbrella term encompasses various activities that integrate technology, social interaction, and content creation. Social media includes blogs, wikis, photo and video sharing, creation or production of podcasts, social networking, discussion boards, and ever-emerging new media. Platforms include, but are not limited to, Facebook, LinkedIn, X, Instagram, Threads, Medium, YouTube, and Nextdoor.

Social networking: The use of social media as a communication tool for building online communities and communicating with groups of people.

Terms of service: The conditions established by a third-party social-media application provider, that must be accepted before a user is given access to the tool.

Terms of use: The conditions established by DSHS to manage agency-sponsored social media sites.

Policy Requirements

Social media is composed of powerful platforms of communication. Billions of individuals and groups use social media to share information and connect with others. DSHS uses social media to enhance communication and engagement with customers, partners, stakeholders, employers, team members, and others to support its mission, key goals, and core processes.

This policy describes how DSHS uses social media and gives direction and guidelines for proper use of social media while at work and outside the workplace.

1. DSHS authorizes the use of the department's social media **only** for preapproved official state business purposes.
 - a. Office of communications and government affairs employees authorized to use social media for approved agency purposes must:
 - i. Never post any information that is designated by law or administrative rule as sensitive or confidential.
 - ii. Comply with all DSHS security and confidentiality requirements.
 - iii. Read and comply with the social media site's terms of service and privacy policy.
 - iv. Use social media sites for approved agency purposes consistent with federal and state privacy laws and policies.
 - v. Comply with copyright and intellectual property requirements.
 - vi. Post a term of use statement and the [DSHS's privacy notice](#) on any

- DSHS sponsored social media site that allows comments.
- vii. Retain all content in accordance with DSHS's [records retention policy](#) because all social media content, including user comments, constitutes a public record.
- b. DSHS social media must not be used to transmit information or knowingly connect to sites for an unlawful or prohibited purpose. See provisions and restrictions in administrative policies [15.18.2](#) and [18.91](#). Additional examples include, but are not limited to the following:
- Discrimination based on sex, race, creed, color, gender identity or expression, religion, age, marital status, national origin, sensory, mental or physical disability, sexual orientation, or veteran status.
 - Sexual harassment or sites containing sexual content.
 - Transmission of obscene materials.
 - Transmission of protected or private information.
 - Infringement on any copyright.
 - Expression of any campaign, political, or religious beliefs.
 - Conduct of a personal, outside, or other business for the purpose of financial benefit or gain.
 - Vulgar, offensive, threatening or harassing language, or personal attacks.
 - Promotion or advertising of commercial services, entities, or products.
2. The non-business personal use of social media by employees during business hours or using department resources (time and equipment) is prohibited.
3. Department social media use is subject to all federal, state, and agency laws, policies, and guidelines. It is the responsibility of all site sponsors and their approved employee site users to be familiar with the following:
- DSHS [administrative policy 18.64](#) disability related [reasonable accommodation](#).
 - DSHS [administrative policy 7.02](#) [equal access to services for individuals with disabilities](#).
 - DSHS [administrative policy 18.66](#) [discrimination, harassment and other inappropriate behaviors](#).
 - DSHS [administrative policy 15.10](#) [security information can also be found here to obtain information security policies and standards](#) documents.
 - DSHS [administrative policy 5.01](#) [privacy – safeguarding confidential information](#).
 - DSHS [administrative policy 18.64](#) [standards of ethical conduct for employees](#).
 - DSHS [administrative policy 18.91](#) [use of resources](#).
 - Washington state and department records retention policies.
 - The DSHS administrative policy 05.04 records retention and [WA Secretary of State - state agencies records retention schedule](#)

Procedures

1. To maintain agency branding, the office of communications and government affairs at the direction of the senior director or designee is responsible for establishing and supervising all social media accounts for the agency. Individual administrations, programs, and units within administrations may not establish a DSHS-sponsored social media account. "Rogue" accounts can have the best intentions but too many voices and inconsistency in messaging dilutes the agency's brand. With more than 18,000 employees and eight administrations, we must limit the number of accounts the agency uses to one agency account per platform.
2. The office of communications and government affairs, at the direction of the senior director or designee, is responsible for establishing, monitoring, and administering policies for appropriate conduct, content, security, and records retention on all social media accounts for the agency.
3. Posting and maintaining content on DSHS-sponsored social media accounts is limited to social media representatives designated by the senior director. Only social media representatives are permitted to log on and post content to DSHS social media accounts.
4. Administrations, programs, and units of the agency are encouraged to contribute content for posting to social media sites. Content should be developed for administrations, through their communications lead who will then work with the office of communications and government affairs to get posted. Social media content should be given in advance, content will be posted or scheduled in a timely manner. In the event of an emergency closure, weather event, etc. a media relations manager is always on call and has the ability to post.
5. Social media account management must take place during paid work hours using state equipment.
6. Make sure the facts are accurate before asking DSHS office of communications and government affairs to post information.
7. Correct errors quickly. If a mistake is made the agency will admit it. We will be upfront and quickly provide correct information. If appropriate, we will modify an earlier post to make it clear that the error has been corrected.

Obligations regarding personal use of social media

DSHS takes no position on employees' personal use of social media outside the workplace

(that is, using their own time and their own resources). It is the agency's obligation, however, to inform all staff of their responsibilities regarding communications involving the agency, its employees, and its customers on personal social media sites:

1. Employees must not represent that they speak on behalf of the agency on a personal social media site. Employees who mention DSHS as their employer on a personal media site should identify any views they express as theirs and not representative of the views of the agency.
2. Disclosure of confidential agency information is prohibited. DSHS employees may not post confidential or private information about the agency, other employees, clients, residents or patients on any social media site. Sharing private or confidential information is subject to disciplinary action up to and including dismissal.
3. Posting agency business, such as sharing information that could identify a client or other confidential information, on personal social media sites is prohibited. Agency business is to be performed during established work hours using agency resources. Employees must not conduct agency business or discuss work-related issues on personal social media sites. See provisions and restrictions in [AP 18.91](#) use of resources.

Recommended best practices

The following best practices are highly recommended for any DSHS employee who use social media:

- Employees identifying themselves as working for a state government agency need to be aware that [article 28 of the collective bargaining agreement](#) states "off-duty activities of an employee will not be grounds for disciplinary action unless said activities are a conflict of interest as set forth in [chapter 42.52 RCW](#), or are detrimental to the employee's work performance or the program of the agency." If a post is deemed to have detrimental connotations to an agency or to a staff member's ability to perform their position, the agency can take disciplinary action against the employee, up to and including dismissal.
- Be respectful. Individuals should be thoughtful in personal posts and respectful of how other people in their work and personal life may be affected or viewed by those who read your posts. When disagreeing with others' opinions, keep it appropriate and polite.
- Honor others' privacy. If an employee plans to post photos they have taken of work-related events and activities, be courteous by checking first with co-workers who are in the picture. Not everyone wants their photo displayed on social media.
- Employees should be aware of their DSHS association. Individuals who identify themselves as a DSHS employee or who have a public-facing position within the agency should ensure their profile and related content (even if it is of a personal and not an official nature) is consistent with how they wish to present

themselves as a DSHS professional. All content should be appropriate with the public trust associated with their position.

- Have no expectation of privacy. Remember that posts in the social media world are or can easily be made available to the public at large. Keep in mind that content published on social media will be widely accessible for some time and, in some cases, indefinitely.

DSHS Official