


Public Information

	Louisiana Department of Health (LDH)	
	Policy Number	72.1
	Content	Protocols for News Media, Public Information, Emergencies and Reportable Incidents
	Effective Date	June 10, 2003
	Inquiries to	Public Information Officer DHH/Bureau of Media and Communications P. O. Box 3234 Baton Rouge, LA 70821-3234 Phone: (225) 342-1532 Fax: (225) 342-3738

LDH is committed to fostering, cultivating and preserving a culture of equity, diversity and inclusion. Our human capital is the most valuable asset we have. The collective sum of the individual differences, life experiences, knowledge, inventiveness, innovation, self-expression, unique capabilities and talent that our employees invest in their work represents a significant part of not only our culture, but our Department's reputation and achievement as well.

If there is a discrepancy between an LDH Policy and a Program Office or facility policy, the LDH policy shall govern/overrule/supersede the conflicting section within the Program Office or facility policy.

I. POLICY STATEMENT

This policy is in keeping with the department's desire to accurately inform the public about its work and to share important information about health care and services available through departmental programs. This policy shall be carried out under the direction of the Office of the Secretary through its Bureau of Media and Communications (BMAC) and shall conform with the provisions of Louisiana's Public Records Law, R.S.44.1 et seq.

II. APPLICABILITY

This policy is applicable to all LDH employees, offices, institutions and facilities, and applies to all functions designed to publicize departmental activities or to respond to media inquiries about LDH programs, services, etc.

III. EFFECTIVE DATE

The effective date of this revised policy is June 10, 2003.

IV. RESPONSIBILITIES

The Bureau of Media and Communications (BMAC) is established to help LDH and its employees appropriately communicate with the internal and external audiences. While the Bureau provides many functions, the following are important to note for purposes of this policy: Coordinate with the LDH Secretary to ensure that media requests are handled appropriately. Provide appropriate media-related support and training to LDH managers and employees. Provide technical assistance in developing brochures, pamphlets, news releases, print and electronic public service announcements, media campaigns, etc.

The Intergovernmental Relations section of this Bureau coordinates communication with legislators and members of Congress; coordinates all legislative activities; reviews/tracks legislation.

V. POLICY PROVISIONS

A. General Procedures and Guidelines

These procedures and guidelines are designed to ensure timely and accurate communications with the media in a continuing effort to keep Louisiana citizens informed.

LDH employees, in the scope of their employment, who are contacted by media representatives and asked to speak on behalf of departmental programs, services or issues should first contact the BMAC Director to discuss the nature of the media contact. The BMAC Director, with the employee and the appropriate managers, will determine the proper contact/response and will coordinate that contact/response accordingly. Such contact includes, but is not limited to, the following subjects:

- Legislative issues (including appropriations, capital outlay).
- Statements/comments about LDH policies.
- Potential or actual crises (threats to the health/safety of citizens/LDH clients).
- Areas outside the employee's/manager's jurisdiction.

- Potentially sensitive issues or subjects (budget cuts, program changes, cases of client abuse/neglect, etc.).

B. Special Procedures

1) Contracts for Special Public Relations Services

Employees, managers and programs shall contact the BMAC Director before contracting for public relations/information/advertising services. The BMAC Director will determine if the services are available/feasible within the department before a contract for the services is processed.

2) Public Affairs/Programs/Interviews

Employees shall contact the BMAC Director for approval to be interviewed or appear on any public affairs program on behalf of departmental programs, services or issues. This notification shall be initiated at the earliest possible time.

3) Promotional Activities

LDH employees shall confer with the BMAC Director regarding the development of any publicity or information campaigns relating to LDH programs or other activities. The BMAC Director shall be informed of any public information, advertising, public service announcements, brochures or other public information materials before they are developed/produced to ensure coordination with overall LDH policies and initiatives.

4) Website

Any information to be placed on the department's website must be coordinated through appropriate staff in BMAC.

5) Media Access to Facilities and Clients

Facility administrators, managers or assistant secretaries shall notify the BMAC Director of all requested visits by media representatives and the nature of the visit. Media visits to facilities must be arranged during daytime working hours and in accordance with state and federal regulations and laws regarding the confidentiality of client's records or identities. After-hours visits may be made only in coordination with the facility manager and the BMAC Director when sufficient justification is provided. Visits must be coordinated to ensure that there is as little disruption as possible in the services to clients. In cases of emergency or disaster situations, refer to Section II of this policy for detailed procedures and notifications.

6) Privacy Rights of Clients

LDH employees shall not arrange or permit media interviews or photographs of LDH clients, unless the clients have signed release statements (see Appendix A) prior to the events. The following special procedures should be adhered to:

- A copy of the signed release shall be kept on file at the facility or office.

- The original copy of the signed release should be provided to the media representative.
- Where appropriate, the guardian or custodian of a minor or client shall sign the release form.
- Where appropriate, the attending physician shall concur in the decision to permit the interview or photo session.
- The office or facility shall control the event to protect the privacy rights of other clients.
- State and federal regulations prohibit the release of information to the media about a specific client of a forensic facility.
- Clients of LDH facilities, clinics, etc. shall have their rights to privacy honored. Information about these clients shall not be released without obtaining the appropriate releases as described above.
- When clients speak to the media on their own accord, LDH employees are still bound to observe the client's confidentiality and must obtain a written release from the client before releasing information from the client's file.
- In cases involving information about alcohol and other drug treatment programs, the facility should be guided by the terms established in the manual, Communications and Collaboration between the Alcohol and Other Drug and Public Health Systems." In all cases, the facility should submit such requests to the LDH Bureau of Legal Services for approval before responding.

C. EMERGENCIES AND REPORTABLE INCIDENTS

1) Types of Emergencies and Reportable Incidents

This section addresses the internal reporting protocol for departmental staff and the coordination of any information that is intended for public release.

Emergencies and incidents include:

- Public protests or demonstrations at facilities or offices
- Incidents involving employees, clients or facilities (e.g. incidents that result in death, emergency hospitalization, elopement or any other emergency response resulting in the notification of fire, police, sheriff, ambulance, etc.)
- Disasters such as fires, floods and other acts of God and man, including acts intended to disrupt the workplace that may affect the health and safety of the public, clients or employees.

2) Reporting Procedures

The steps outlined below must be followed by any employee who has knowledge of, or is a witness to, any reportable incident:

- a) Take immediate measures to protect the safety and well-being of the client(s) and/or employees involved and notify supervisory personnel. The supervisor must then immediately notify a senior administrative

- official (or designee) and follow up with a written report within one business day.
- b) Upon notification of an incident, the senior administrative official (or designee) must immediately notify the Secretary and the **Deputy Secretary/Undersecretary/appropriate** Assistant Secretary (or designee) AND the BMAC director (or designee).
 - c) Immediately upon verbal notification, the BMAC director (or designee) will begin developing any information appropriate for public dissemination.
 - d) Within 24 hours of an incident involving a death or allegation of abuse or neglect, the responsible agency [OBH, OCDD, OPH, etc.] will provide the Office of the Secretary with a written report. This report shall describe all facts of the incident known at the time.
 - e) Within 72 hours of such incident, a more detailed report will be submitted to the Office of the Secretary. This report shall describe all additional facts learned during the course of the immediate investigation and what further steps are necessary.

3. Emergency Preparedness

Refer to LDH Emergency Preparedness Policy #65 for procedure regarding the responsibility of LDH offices in the event of a disaster/emergency.

VI. REVISION HISTORY

Date	Revision
August 03, 2001	Policy created
June 10, 2003	Policy revised
July 31, 2017	Policy reviewed
April 3, 2019	Policy reviewed
November 30, 2023	Policy reviewed
November 7, 2024	Policy reviewed

WAIVER OF LIABILITY

On request of the following named news agency for an interview and/or photographs (still, video, or motion pictures) for the specific purpose of _____,

I recognize that _____

is acting only as the intermediary, making it possible for the news agency named above to contact me.

As such, I relieve and hereby agree to hold _____

free and harmless from any and all liability arising out of the interview or photography session

and subsequent publication or broadcast. I understand that the interview/photographs are being carried out with my consent to the news agency named above and so assume full responsibility.

I further understand that information and/or pictures from this interview shall not be used in conjunction with any future news and/or feature presentation without any express consent.

DATE _____ PATIENT OR SUBJECT PERSON _____

DATE _____ PARENT OR GUARDIAN _____

DATE _____ WITNESS _____