

## New Hampshire Seacoast Public Health Network is First to Change Advisory Council Meeting Times in order to be More Accessible to People with Disabilities

As a result of New Hampshire Disability & Public Health Project (NH DPH) outreach to the state's 13 Regional Public Health Networks (PHN), NH DPH staff member, [Kathy Bates](#), now participates on the Public Health Advisory Councils (PHAC) of two regions, Strafford County and Seacoast. Congratulations to these two PHNs for a big step forward in committing to accessible public health! An expert advocate and self-advocate, Kathy's presence will provide experience, technical assistance and a crucial voice for the disability community.

New Hampshire's 13 Regional PHNs encompass the state's cities and towns. Each PHN has a Community Health Improvement Plan and is advised by a PHAC. The long-term goal of the PHNs and their PHACs is to collectively develop a performance-based public health delivery system that provides all [10 Essential Public Health Services](#) in their regions.

NH DPH encourages the PHNs to include people with disabilities on their PHACs and has raised the issue of accessible meeting times. As some individuals with disabilities rely on assistance from others and/or take longer to get ready in the morning, NH DPH staff have explained that late morning meetings would facilitate more inclusive participation. After hearing how many groups are not willing to change the early morning times of standing meetings, the Seacoast PHAC decided that they would be proud to be the first to change the meeting time from 8:00am to make it more accessible..

*"We need to walk the talk. If we talk about equity and inclusion, we need to be prepared to act and co-create space for us to work together. Changing the time of our meeting is one thing we can do at the system level to improve access to our Public Health Advisory Council Meetings."* Paula Smith, Seacoast PHAC

NH DPH also engages with regional public health in New Hampshire by offering disability-related training to the PHNs and their affiliates. Between September 2018 and May 2019, we trained over 230 public health professionals and stakeholders in cultural competence with disability. Upcoming trainings focus on the creation of accessible content and dissemination.

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