



**NORTHERN
HEALTH REGION**

Communications Plan

Revised March 2023

Issue – While we do our best to integrate a communications plan into all of our projects and initiatives, there is a requirement to create an overarching communication plan for the organization. This plan, at its highest level is to support and aid in the delivery of the Region’s Mission, in support of achieving the Vision as set by the Board of Directors.

Background –The Northern Regional Health Authority (Northern Health Region) was created in May 2012 through the amalgamation of the former NOR-MAN and the Burntwood Regional Health Authorities. The Northern Health Region is geographically the largest of the five RHAs in the province of Manitoba. The Region has a population of 72,000 people spread over 396,000 km², resulting in a population density of 0.18 persons per km² compared to 2.19 persons per km² for the entire province of Manitoba.

Situational Analysis – The Northern Health Region’s brand has been well accepted to date among our disparate stakeholder population. We continue to build and maintain a respectful relationship with local media and have benefitted significantly from that enhanced relationship building. The CEO has made stakeholder relations a priority in keeping with the Board approved Community Engagement Strategy. As a result, dialogue with stakeholders is an ongoing part of doing business and challenges can be addressed and managed quite routinely, minimizing the need for frequent crisis responses. The organization enjoys a good relationship with its Board (through its CEO) and includes a leadership team who are committed to living the organization’s values in pursuit of the Mission and Vision, as approved by the Board.

Communications Goal and Objectives – The goal of the plan is to support and assist the organization to achieve its Vision, while delivering on the promise of its Mission in a way that demonstrates that the Board, Management and Staff of the Region are living the Core Values.

Communications Objectives – The objectives in support of the goal are as follows:

1. To ensure staff has adequate and timely information which provides valid, “true” information, quells rumours, provides comfort and articulates the overall rationale, goal and benefits of the Mission, Vision and Core Values.
2. To ensure staff see and experience a transparent and respectful organization and that they understand their role in achieving the mandate of the organization successfully.
3. To ensure adequate two-way communication is maintained between the organization’s leadership and the staff of the Region.
4. To ensure the public understands and supports the Vision, Mission and Core Values as well as the strategic priorities of the Region.
5. To keep stakeholders informed about significant milestones, achievements and challenges in a timely and accessible way.
6. To consult with stakeholders, as appropriate, to ensure adequate public input and dialogue in keeping with the Board’s Community Engagement Strategy.

7. To ensure government sees and hears about a well-managed Northern Health Region committed to excellence in patient-centred service delivery.
8. To continue to support the integration of the two former RHA's cultures to create a common service experience for all 'customers.'
9. To assist staff in understanding the importance and benefits of achieving synergies throughout the organization and to support them in achieving those synergies.

Stakeholders – Our stakeholders are listed as either internal or external to the organization.

Internal

All Regional leadership, management and staff

Physicians and other independent contractors

The Region's Board of Directors

Volunteers/Auxiliaries and Foundations

External

The citizens of the Northern Health Region

Government officials (Municipal, Provincial, Federal)

First Nations (organizations, communities, Chiefs/Councils, Health Directors

Media

Family members of Northern Health Region staff members

Patients/clients/family members

Unions and union officials of NRHA staff

Manitoba Service Delivery Organizations (Prairie Mountain, Interlake Eastern, Southern Health Santé Sud, Winnipeg, Shared Health, and Cancer Care MB)

Manitoba Health, Seniors & Active Living (let's add in the 3 department...Health, Seniors and Mental Wellness Recovery...would need proper names)

Strategic Considerations – A best practice approach based on leading evidenced based decision making, combined with decades of communications experience guides our approach. Here are a number which helped inform this plan:

- Leaders are exposed to RHA strategic information earlier than most staff and are therefore ahead of their staff in processing and understanding those types of issues. It is important to allow time for staff to ‘catch up’ to their leaders so you don’t get ahead of them.
- Don’t underestimate the need to move quickly with communication. Always be prepared to fill the information vacuum.
- Poor execution is just as bad (or even worse) than a poor plan.
- Frequent pro-active communication pre-empts employee hearsay, rumors and distractions.
- Leadership at all levels must support the overall goals of the Vision, Mission and Core Values to make them real to their staff. Conflicting goals amongst departments can be dangerous.
- Ensure there is less focus on organizational charts and more focus on new and improved business processes achieved through synergies and cooperation.
- Help employees understand what the Vision, Mission and Core Values mean and the intended outcomes or results we expect to achieve along the way.
- Plans need to be detailed. Don’t make assumptions or allow others to do so because of a lack of specifics.

Key Messages – the following are our key messages for the Region:

- We are committed to working together with our stakeholders in achieving our Vision through the delivery of the promise of our Mission.
- Our focus is, and will always be, the patients we serve through the delivery of seamless, regionally-consistent high quality, patient-centered care.
- We are committed to continuous improvement in everything we do while ensuring smooth patient centric processes.
- We work in partnership with our healthcare professionals and our staff throughout the organization, realizing we cannot possibly achieve true, sustainable success without them.
- We believe that our Vision, Mission and Core Values are more than words on paper. This is an opportunity for us to demonstrate that commitment to our patients and the communities we serve.
- We benefit from public consultation. We welcome the opportunity for two-way communication with community members and our Indigenous partners about the services we provide and create multiple channels for the public to make that communication easier.
- We welcome the opportunity to join with our Northern neighbours to create a stronger, more effective and efficient health system which will ultimately improve the health status of the citizens we are here to serve.

- As we continue in our transition as a single, unified Region, any changes in the way we do our work will be based on research and best practices and will be done in consultation and collaboration with our staff.
- Patient Safety is and will continue to be an overarching priority for our Region.

Tactics – We will use multiple communication channels and the concept of reach and frequency to ensure our messages reach their intended audience. These tactics are shown as internal and external in their focus.

Internal

- ✓ The Homepage to our intranet site is the computer log-on screen for all networked computers throughout the Region. The intranet allows us to display alerts, service disruption and important messages to staff as soon as they log on to the network. Having it as a log on screen encourages staff to explore this resource further and learn about the array of tools available on the site.
- ✓ The CEO produces a monthly blog entitled *Hello, its Helga* providing another communication channel to focus on items of strategic benefit, while adding a personal touch.
- ✓ The Region's regional management leadership team meets bi-monthly for a one hour long Microsoft Teams meeting to provide key information to middle and senior managers and equip them to cascade that information at subsequent staff meetings with their direct reports.
- ✓ Additional face-to-face meetings are regularly held which include manager update meetings, division or unit staff meetings and site operational meetings. It is critical in a high tech environment not to underestimate the need for 'high touch' meetings of this type.
- ✓ Email will continue to be used for periodic all-staff updates from the CEO or other Vice Presidents on time-sensitive breaking news that needs to reach people quickly.
- ✓ Short videos hosted on sites like You Tube or Vimeo can be used as a way of getting a periodic message from the CEO and VPs out to staff and stakeholder groups with internet access.
- ✓ Ethics for Lunch and Grand Round Presentations are prepared and delivered on a number of important topics or issues and even include health and wellness sessions on managing change and stress, if deemed advisable.

External

- ✓ The Region's website (www.northernhealthregion.com) contains regional information in an accessible and appealing way to encourage frequent visits by staff and external stakeholders. The website will also update its views on on issues that engage or interest the public.
- ✓ *Board Highlights*, a compendium of decisions and key discussion items at every board meeting can be prepared and posted within 4 or 5 days of each board meeting. The most current issue can be sent as a pdf file via email to our staff,

and our key external stakeholders. It can also be archived on the website to demonstrate our transparency to the community.

- ✓ Press releases, media notices and regular interviews will help inform and educate the media and the public.
- ✓ On occasions, newspaper articles penned by regulated health professionals on seasonal topics families can use can be written and submitted to the four major regional newspapers. These articles can also be archived on the website to add value to our local information and reinforce the papers' decision to publish the material.
- ✓ Our Annual General Meeting is a requirement of legislation and an opportunity to meet with members of the public and engage in dialogue.
- ✓ Paid advertising will be used to highlight items, issues and topics of importance to the Region and as way to ensure an unfiltered message is received by the public.
- ✓ The website has a mechanism to encourage and allow the public to leave a complaint or a compliment about the services we provide.
- ✓ The website has a feature that allows the public anywhere in the world to send a message of cheer to a patient within our hospitals and our personal care homes.
- ✓ Public health staff receive support and training to facilitate radio interviews with local radio stations with health information on seasonal, topical issues including tips that families can use. Topics include flu season, the importance of vaccinations, active living, diabetes awareness and prevention, etc.

Resource Implications – Staff time will be a major resource requirement in successfully implementing this plan in support to achieving the objectives identified. The amount of staff time, while difficult to quantify in advance, should not be underestimated or discounted.

Communications' staff resources will be used extensively to manage and execute the majority of the plan.

Senior and regional management must be committed to the plan and be prepared to commit their time and efforts to communicating with their staff within their respective portfolios. They will also need to be prepared to commit the time required of their staff in participating in the delivery of the tactics identified in this plan.

All communication and advertising costs should be tracked with a unique accounting code to ensure they are captured for later reporting.

Timeline – The execution and delivery of the tactics in this plan will be ongoing and occur throughout the year. As a Region, we should never stop communicating with our stakeholders. Our mantra should be "reach versus frequency," that it's reaching the maximum number of people (reach) as often as we can (frequency) with ongoing and regular messages in support of the goal and objectives of this plan.

Evaluation/Measurement – We will use a number of formal and informal evaluation and measurement tools to determine the effectiveness and results of our communication efforts. These will include:

- Periodic online surveys can be conducted to measure communication vehicle effectiveness, and employee attitudes.
- *Board Highlights* has inherent metrics regarding email bounce and rejection rates. That said, this is limited in that it does not guarantee the publication was read by the recipient or forwarded to others.
- We can track calls to the CEO's office on issues and trend their frequency and topic content, along with a positive/negative index.
- Media coverage will be gathered and analyzed as another way of gauging how we are doing.
- The website and intranet have robust metrics capabilities that let us track traffic patterns, document open stats, search requests and more. These will be periodically reported to the Executive Leadership Council and the Board of Directors.
- Publication of submitted articles will be tracked as a way to gauge earned media coverage throughout the Region.

This plan will be adjusted based on what we learn from evaluation and measurement in keeping with the Region's continuous improvement philosophy.