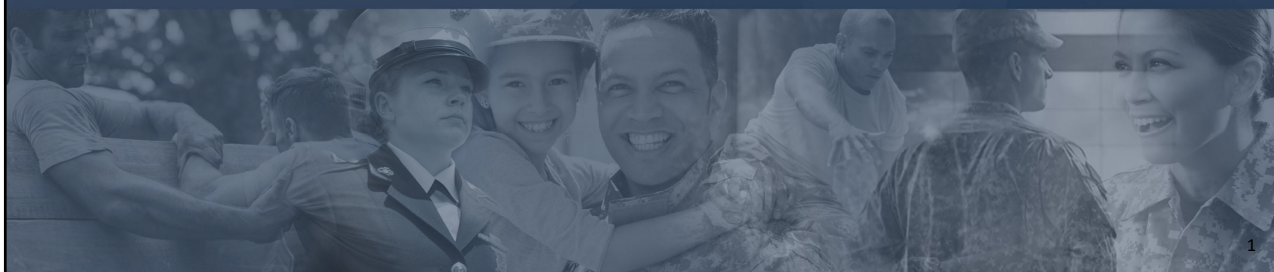


# Effective Public Health Communication Strategies with Department of Defense Personnel



Wilsie Bishop, DPA  
Chair, Public Health Subcommittee  
September 11, 2023



## Overview / Agenda



- Membership
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- Background
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- Summary of Subcommittee Activities to Date
- Emerging Findings
- Areas of Interest
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# Membership



**CHAIR**  
Wilsie Bishop DPA, MPA\*

\*Board Member



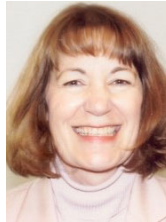
Georges Benjamin, MD



John Clements, PHD



Marion Ehrich, PhD, MS




Ruth Etzel, MD, PHD



Christopher Johnson, PHD

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# Tasking



On May 12, 2023, the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Health Affairs directed the Defense Health Board (DHB) to **provide recommendations on how the DoD could better deliver health information within an environment of misinformation.**

## Background



- Inaccurate information about health harms public health and undermines trust in public health professionals.
- Inaccuracies can be characterized as *misinformation* (good faith errors) and *disinformation* (intentional spread of falsehoods).
- The information landscape during the COVID-19 Pandemic was exceptionally complex and influenced by multiple factors.
- Tension between freedom of expression and protecting the public good permeates efforts to mitigate the impacts of mis- and disinformation.

## Objectives and Scope



- Identify lessons learned about DoD's vulnerabilities and capabilities in disseminating health information during the COVID pandemic.
- Review DoD/DHA policies and processes used for health communications.
- Review academic, commercial, and government research on best practices for health communications.
- Provide recommendations for how the DoD could better deliver health information within an environment of misinformation and threats to credibility.

## Summary of Activities to Date



Meeting Date	Discussion Topics
Jan 20, 2023: PH Meeting	Potential Health Communications tasking
Jun 14, 2023: PH Meeting	Health Communications report development overview
Jun 28, 2023: DHB Meeting	DHA Strategic Communications
Jul 24, 2023: PH Meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Follow-up from DHA Strategic Communications</li> <li>• Public health response to COVID-19</li> </ul>
Aug 25, 2023: PH Meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Military culture</li> <li>• Misinformation and disinformation</li> <li>• A perspective on government censorship</li> <li>• Science of health communications</li> <li>• Informal military communications panel</li> </ul>

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## Emerging Findings



- DoD health communications are military-specific but occur within a complex and influential civilian communication environment.
- Trust is essential to messaging uptake and to successful misinformation and disinformation mitigation efforts. Leadership and trusted messengers are essential components.
- Communicating the underpinnings of public health decisions (e.g., the role of uncertainty in the scientific process; how and why scientists and officials coalesce around certain positions) allows experts to partner with the public on public health decision making.

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## Emerging Findings



- Cultural perspectives, personal experiences, and beliefs may affect perceptions of the legitimacy of the scientific process and public trust. Bilateral communication and appropriate acknowledgement and treatment of minority scientific perspectives is vital even as consensus positions are actioned.
- Understanding variables that influence how communications are received, and working through non-official as well as official channels and mediums, are essential to making DOD communications the message of choice.

## Areas of Interest



- Military spouse perspectives on health communications
- Health communications and the law
- Vaccine refusal
- Media information ecosystem and information flows
- Artificial intelligence technology
- Public understanding of scientific process and digital literacy
- Academic perspective on health communications
- Effectiveness of misinformation interventions (pre/debunking, fact checking etc.)

## Way Ahead



- Subcommittee meetings with briefings from Subject Matter Experts every three weeks beginning September 19
- Regular report development updates to the Subcommittee Chair
- Quarterly updates to the Defense Health Board
- Anticipated Decision Brief June 4, 2024

## Questions

