



# North Carolina

## LOCAL HEALTH DEPARTMENT ACCREDITATION

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**Accreditation Board Meeting**  
**Conference Call**  
**April 8, 2020**  
**12:00 – 1:00 p.m.**  
**Meeting Minutes**

**Board Members Present**

Anna Schenck  
Barbara Beatty  
Benjamin Tillett  
Bertadean Baker  
Calvert Jeffers  
Chris Dobbins  
Connette McMahan  
Jerry Parks  
Kevin Austin  
Larry Michael  
Rebecca McLeod  
Susan Little  
Teresa Ellen  
Virginia Niehaus

**Board Members Not Present**

Barbara Ann Hughes  
David Stanley  
Jackie Newton

**NCIPH Staff Present**

Amy Belflower Thomas  
Lori Rhew  
Lydie Costes

**Welcome and purpose of the call**

Administrator Thomas welcomed everyone to the call and conducted roll call.

Board Chair Chris Dobbins thanked everyone for adjusting their new normal schedules to join the call. He explained that we are proposing changes to the accreditation process given the responses to COVID-19. He noted that we need to recognize that resources are at a premium, staff will be taxed to meet public health demands, but also we need to make sure that we continue to comply with statutory requirements as well as the goal of accreditation.

## **Executive Order 119**

Chair Dobbins proposed that the Board to consider a one-year delay in accreditation by suspending all visits for twelve months. This would provide relief to health departments to respond to the pandemic and allow adequate time to prepare for an accreditation visit. Chair Dobbins invited Board Member Virginia Niehaus to provide a legal summary of the proposal.

Ms. Niehaus reported that on March 20, the Governor signed the Executive Order providing flexibility around local health department accreditation. The order delegates the authority to the Secretary to sub-delegate this Board to waive accreditation scheduling requirements which are established in rules and grant an extension of accreditation of no more than twelve months. The Secretary took official action on March 26 to delegate that authority to this Board, which may be exercised on the condition that doing so is both: 1. Necessary to provide relief to health departments responding to COVID-19, and 2. will not endanger public health. This Executive Order only applies to health departments that are currently fully accredited. It does not apply to counties with conditional accreditation because that timeline for accreditation is set by statute and is not waivable by executive order. This decision must be made within 30 days, by April 19 or until suspended or superseded. However, any actions that the Board takes will remain in effect for the time period that the Board specifies. Any actions must be reported to the Secretary and the Governor, this action is outlined in the memo that Administrator Thomas sent prior to the meeting. Ms. Niehaus suggested clarifying wording in the notice of our decision such that the health departments that will be considered for reaccreditation at the May 2020 meeting will be granted the extension for their next cycle.

Chair Dobbins summarized that we are recommending a twelve-month extension because it meets the two requirements of 1. providing relief to local health departments and 2. it does not endanger public health services to our citizens. This is the option recommended to the Board. Chair Dobbins requested a motion to move forward with the 12-month extension.

Board Member Jerry Parks made a motion to waive accreditation requirements for twelve months. Board Member Calvert Jeffers seconded the motion. Chair Dobbins asked for discussion.

Board Member Jerry Parks asked what we do with our four-year look back when for example, someone did not investigate an environmental health complaint in a timely manner. Will we have leeway with addressing activities that require annual/regular evidence?

Chair Dobbins stated that this is a worthwhile concern and we can modify the interpretation document to provide guidance for the 12-month extension.

Administrator Thomas said that we will have to discuss this further for activities that require annual evidence, and to see if the timeline language is in the activity and benchmark language or the interpretation language. We can change the interpretation language, but not activity or benchmark language.

Board Member Virginia Niehaus agreed that we will need to decide what evidence we will accept in fulfillment of the annual requirements.

Chair Dobbins said that as a health director, given everything currently going on locally, he cannot imagine focusing on accreditation right now. He also stated that what his agency is doing is grounded in public health and should speak volumes about what his agency's ability to respond to public health issues. He can't imagine a health department not performing their core mission given what we are responding to right now.

Board Member Jerry Parks said he thinks we are all on the same page and pointed out that employee evaluations are another example that are not top priority right now.

Board Member Dr. Susan Little asked for clarification about this extension and why it is not applicable to counties under conditional accreditation, yet they are also going through all the same issues due to COVID-19. Why were they not included?

Chair Dobbins confirmed that we currently have one county under conditional accreditation.

Board Member Virginia Niehaus said that there is a statute that explicitly states that conditional accreditation lasts for two years. Because executive authority extends to rules not statutes, counties that are conditionally accredited do not qualify for the waiver.

Chair Dobbins stated that this action provides a level playing field for all health departments and allows our collective work to speak for itself. The actions health departments are taking right now are exactly the sorts of things that accreditation looks for: to see the fruits of the work of public health professionals. The extension provides relief and does not put our public health system in danger.

Chair Dobbins requested a last call for comments and questions. He then made a motion to extend public health accreditation in North Carolina for a period not to exceed twelve months. Board Member Virginia Niehaus asked to amend the motion to say, "twelve months," instead of "not more than twelve months." The revised motion is to extend accreditation for all health departments after the May 8<sup>th</sup> meeting for a period of twelve months. The motion unanimously passed.

### **May 8, 2020 Board Meeting**

Administrator Thomas announced that we were able to finish all site visits this spring. The last one, Duplin County, was a little challenging because their computer system was hacked, and they were without the system for about a month; they did great under the circumstances. All the health departments for this cycle are recommended for reaccreditation, so the Board meeting will need to take place to adjudicate those decisions. The meeting will be virtual, and we will try to tighten the time frame for when health departments will need to be present. She asked for any questions or concerns.

Board Member Dr. Anna Schenck asked if we were able to comply with open meeting requirements given the steps needed to keep Zoom meetings secure.

Administrator Thomas confirmed that there has been some guidance on that topic from the School of Government. This is an open meeting so it must be posted, but we can still make it password-protected and take other security measures.

Board Member Virginia Niehaus stated that there has been some back and forth discussion of whether state employees may participate in a Zoom video call or will need to call in.

Administrator Thomas noted that if that is the case, members should let NCLHDA staff know.

### **Standards Workgroup**

Administrator Thomas explained that we were just starting the 18-month workplan of the Accreditation Standards Workgroup. Due to COVID-19, the process has been momentarily postponed. There are two possibilities going forward: we could take a break and push the timeline back, or we could take advantage of the 12-month accreditation extension to accelerate this process. She explained that a document with the timeline for each of these approaches was sent to Board Members with the meeting materials.

Board Member Dr. Susan Little requested that we discuss further when and how the workgroup would start in late May under the acceleration model, given that everyone is under different situations in their daily lives.

Administrator Thomas noted that it is challenging to assess the group's availability in that some have more time right now and others have less time. About half of participants said they were be able to participate in the webinar that was to be held in March. Amazingly, most local health department representatives said they could attend. She explained that we would ask the workgroup members if they can continue to be a part of the workgroup given the changing circumstances.

Board Member Dr. Susan Little suggested that we consider a variety of options for in-person and remote meeting depending on the status of social distancing recommendations at that time, particularly as the current space planned at DPH would not allow for ample space for social distancing.

Administrator Thomas agreed. She requested opinions from health directors whether it would be helpful to have the new revisions ready in a year versus having the old material for the next year and then diving into something new. A third option would be to shift the focus of the workgroup to modify requirements for this specific year of extension.

Board Member Dr. Susan Little pointed out that the work of re-evaluation of requirements for this year will need to happen either way, and it could be a wise use of this workgroup.

Board Member Kevin Austin mentioned that in the accelerated model, the departments with fall 2021 visits would officially only have 6 months to deal with changes, but in fact they would have more notice because the workgroup will be sending out earlier notifications to alert of changes.

Administrator Thomas agreed; in the accelerated model there would be spring 2021 webinars to train health departments to prepare for the changes. Additionally, the program is planning to create a reference document around COVID-19 that suggests how COVID-19 responses can be used as evidence for specific activities.

Board member Kevin Austin thought moving forward during this accreditation pause is the best plan.

Administrator Thomas agreed, particularly as the accreditation program will have more time to do this work right now. She also mentioned that if we choose to accelerate, we may need to switch some individuals off the workgroup who do not have time.

Chair Dobbins commented that whatever we decide today, we can be ready to pivot and modify if things change. Despite asking for approval to move forward, we should not feel locked into a decision on this as we may need to adjust.

Administrator Thomas agreed and stated that we do need to add language in the memo to local health directors to emphasize that things may change.

### **Reminder SEI Statements/Ethics Training**

Administrator Thomas reminded everyone that SEI statements are due next Wednesday the 15<sup>th</sup> (tax day) and noted that everyone should have received reminders. Some people also have ethics trainings due; those of you who are due for those should have received reminder emails.

### **Adjourn**

Chair Dobbins thanked Administrator Thomas and the rest of the administrative staff, Board Member Virginia Niehaus' legal technical assistance, and everyone for taking time out of their hectic worlds to attend the call. He also thanked everyone for endorsing the twelve-month extension, which will benefit both our public health departments and the accreditation staff.

### **Next Board Meeting: May 8, 2020**

Via Zoom: <https://uncsph.zoom.us/j/393533300?pwd=TIY1dVJGWVd2MVlxamlXZitlSjJIUT09>

Meeting ID: 393 533 300

Password: 127279