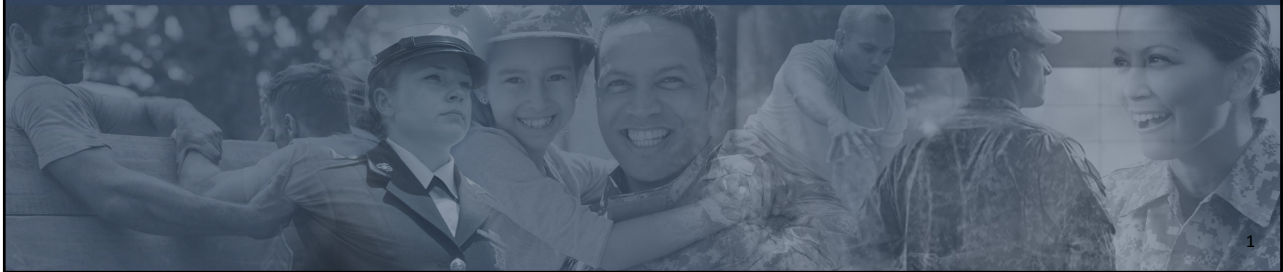


Effective Public Health Communication Strategies with Department of Defense Personnel



Wilsie Bishop, DPA
Chair, Public Health Subcommittee
March 5, 2024



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Overview / Agenda



- Membership
- Tasking
- Objectives and Scope
- Report/ToR Crosswalk
- Background
- Guiding Principles
- Emerging Findings
- Way Forward
- Backup Slides: Summary of Subcommittee Activities to Date

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Membership



CHAIR
Wilsie Bishop DPA, MPA*

*Board Member



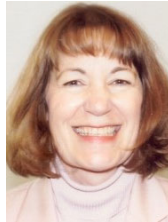
Georges Benjamin, MD



John Clements, PHD



Marion Ehrich, PhD, MS



Ruth Etzel, MD, PHD

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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.**

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Objectives and Scope




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

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Report/ToR Crosswalk



Chapter	ToR Objective A	ToR Objective B	ToR Objective C	ToR Objective D
1	X		X	X
2			X	X
3		X		X
(4)				

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Background – Preparing for Future Health Emergencies



- DoD must be proactive and maintain a state of readiness to combat future health emergencies
 - “warm body of activity”
 - Public Health input is needed from the policy level through implementation down to the deck plate
- DoD must clarify desired outcomes of health communication:
 - Number of messages sent?
 - Increased health behaviors? How to measure?

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Background – The International and National Context



- Complex national and international communication environments characterized by time lag resulting from (in part) sequential decision making; varied priorities impacting cohesion essential to coordinated response

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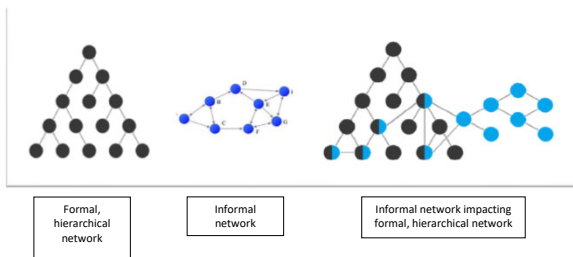
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Background – Societal Trends



Features of the modern information environment impacts efforts by institutions (including DoD) to shape and direct information consumption.



Hierarchies transmit information vertically.
Networks spread information horizontally and impact hierarchical communications.



Social media algorithmically sorts users into “echo chambers” and prioritizes user engagement over accuracy (and civility).

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Background – The COVID-19 Infodemic



“We’re not just fighting an epidemic; we’re fighting an infodemic.”

-World Health Organization (WHO)
Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus


- Proliferation of misinformation and disinformation
 - Some intentionally directed to Service members to undermine readiness
- Politization of public health and science
- Decline in trust and willingness to take vaccines and adhere to non-medical interventions

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Background – DoD’s Vaccine Mandate and Recission




- December 11, 2020
 - FDA approves Emergency Use Authorization for Pfizer Vaccine
- August 23, 2021
 - FDA fully approves the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine for all people ages 18 years and older
- August 24, 2021
 - DoD issues Coronavirus Disease 2019 requirement for Members of the Armed Forces *after vaccine was fully approved by the FDA
- January 10, 2023
 - DoD rescinds August 24, 2021 (and subsequent November 30, 2021) Coronavirus Disease 2019 vaccination requirement for Members of the Armed Forces, in accordance with 2023 National Defense Authorization Act

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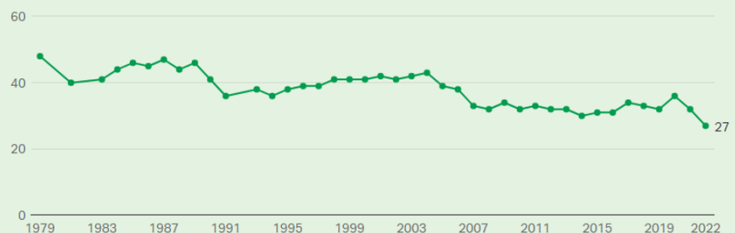
Background – The State of Trust



- Trust in major institutions has declined.
- Trust in the military and in scientists has declined but remains high.

Average Confidence in Major U.S. Institutions, 1979-2022

Figures are the average percentage of U.S. adults who have a great deal or quite a lot of confidence across institutions asked consistently by Gallup.



The average includes only those asked consistently by Gallup since 1979 or 1993 (when the list of institutions was expanded). The institutions asked consistently since 1979 are the church/organized religion, the military, the Supreme Court, banks, public schools, newspapers, Congress, organized labor and big business. In 1993 the list of institutions was expanded to include television news, the presidency, the police, the medical system and the criminal justice system.

Get the data

GALLUP

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Guiding Principles



- Time is of the essence. DoD must prepare for the next health emergency now and sustain the infrastructure to ramp up as needed.
- DoD health communications are military-specific but occur within a complex and influential civilian communication environment. DoD health communications as a discipline must adapt to the current and future information environment.

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Guiding Principles



- Trust is essential to messaging uptake and to successful misinformation and disinformation mitigation efforts. Leadership and trusted messengers play an essential role in creating and sustain trust.
- Cultural and political perspectives, personal experiences, and beliefs may affect perceptions of the legitimacy of the scientific process and public trust.

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Guiding Principles



- Communicating the underpinnings of public health decision making encourages partnership between experts and citizens.
 - Explain the role of uncertainty in the scientific process
 - Explain how/why scientists and officials coalesce around certain positions and not others
- Communicators of health information must provide recommendations based on available evidence and facts at the time. They must be clear about what they know and what they don't and be honest about the scope of their expertise.

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Emerging Findings



- Findings and Recommendations are coalescing into three areas:
 - Organizational
 - Societal and infodemic-related factors that impact the military and beneficiary population
 - Best practices in health communications

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Emerging Findings



- FINDING: Communication challenges during the pandemic suggest that current DoD communication channels are not optimized for health information.
- FINDING: Delays in decision making and communication at the global and federal level in the early days of the pandemic impacted the timeliness of DoD's communication of Force Health Protection guidance.
- FINDING: The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated that threats to public health can be threats to national security.

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Emerging Findings



- FINDING: DoD is a heterogenous institution whose members may be influenced through multiple networks beyond the chain of command.
- FINDING: DoD guidance pertains to promoting routine MHS health care, not to managing a health care emergency.
- FINDING: Best practices and research findings can inform efforts to maximize messaging impact.

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Way Ahead



- Continue report development with the Chair and Subcommittee
- Anticipated Decision Brief on June 4, 2024

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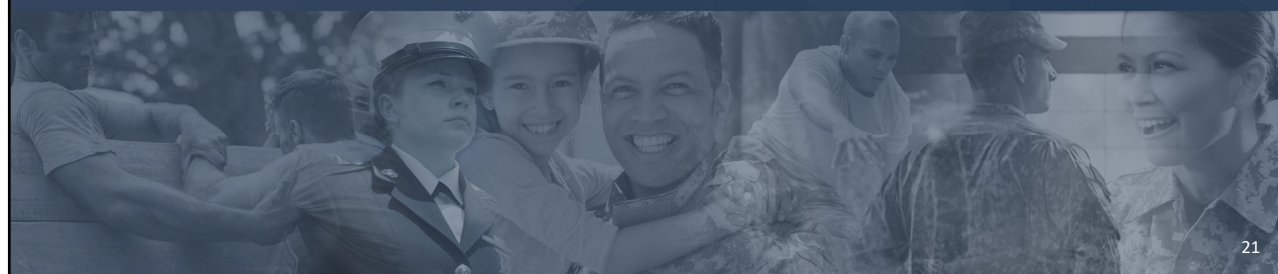
Questions



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Back Up Slides



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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"> • Follow-up from DHA Strategic Communications • Public health response to COVID-19
Aug 25, 2023: PH Meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Military culture • Misinformation and disinformation • A perspective on government censorship • Science of health communications • Informal military communications panel

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Summary of Activities to Date



Meeting Date	Discussion Topics
Sep 19, 2023: PH Meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DoD/DHA legal authorities • Report Development
Oct 10, 2023: PH Meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public health communication strategies • Civic Online Reasoning
Oct 31, 2023: PH Meeting	Military spouse panel
Nov 21, 2023: PH Meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health Risk Communication • News and information environment
Nov 29, 2023: DHB Meeting	Tasker Update

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Summary of Activities to Date



Meeting Date	Discussion Topics
Dec 12, 2023: PH Meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The deadly rise of anti-science • Report development discussion • Emergency communications and operations in the information environment
Jan 2, 2024: PH Meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • COVID-19 Learnings from the front lines • Report development discussion
Jan 16, 2024: PH Meeting	Report development discussion
Jan 30, 2024: PH Meeting	Report development discussion
Feb 27, 2024: PH Meeting	Report development discussion

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