

GROUP PROJECT 6/10/2020

METROWEST HEALTH FOUNDATION LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

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WHAT THE REGION DID WELL Consider the topics covered in the program: personal leadership styles, health equity, using data, managing change, working in coalitions, successful negotiation and effective messaging.

- **The region took the issue seriously; initial messaging of “staying home” was clear and followed.** Leaders such as Senator Spilka, Representative Dykema, and Representative Kennedy were consistent with their messaging.
- **Municipal departments and nonprofit organizations worked together to outreach and offer resources to communities.** Outreach to deliver critical needs such as prescription drugs, childcare, food and PPE was conducted through flyers, emails and collaboration with other municipal departments.
- **Through a collaborative group - Coalition for Local Public Health (CLPH)** we were able to work with the Covid-19 task force to voice concerns and frustrations from all local boards of health. This platform facilitated open communication between local government, DPH and the Governor’s office. We provided guidance to DPH on the importance of delivering consistent and frequent messaging to the people with “boots on the ground”. Additionally, in a very short amount of time, we were able to develop and submit a proposal based on the recently passed Special Commission on Local and Regional Public Health (SAPHE) Act. This proposal was scheduled to be presented to Secretary Sudders last week. It is during this crisis local public health has been granted the opportunity to request funding and look towards a more regional approach to public health effectiveness and efficiently in the state of Massachusetts.
- **Emergency Preparedness Plan:** towns with an emergency preparedness plan, such as Hopkinton and Needham have an Emergency Preparedness Director and a strong pre-established Emergency Management Team. They fared well as they were ready to launch an incident command system (ICS) at the onset of the pandemic. Under this type of leadership, town management knew what steps to take for responding and communicating to their community.
- **Clear, concise, visually pleasing online text and infographics** on some Town websites (Hopkinton, Needham, and Framingham) made a huge difference in pushing out information to the public and their engagement with it.

WHAT COULD HAVE BEEN BETTER *The group would like to note that the MetroWest region is not a unified body with defined practices and policies. This makes communication of best practices and resources difficult, unorganized, time consuming, etc.*

- **CONSISTENCY IN THE OF SHARING OF INFORMATION AND HOW COMMUNITIES ARE MEETING BASIC NEEDS** Some town Public Health Directors or Communications Directors or Public Information Officers (Hopkinton and Needham) were good at sharing what towns were doing, while others were not. “Every municipality seems to be doing its own thing.” “Essential businesses” varied from town to town until the state finally defined the list. Ex: Somerville defined a smoke shop as “essential.” Natick was “ahead,” it posted its infection data early, but then took the data down, when bullying and privacy

became issues. There was uneven reporting of data on the state and municipal level, which muddied the waters and angered residents. (ex: MA DPH issued a protocol to local municipalities where towns with populations under 50,000 were not required to report death rates. This resulted in frustration by community members for what seemed like a lack of transparency.)

- **BETTER & QUICKER GUIDANCE FROM SENIOR STAFF TO MIDDLE MANAGEMENT ON HOW TO SUPPORT STAFF.** Many municipal and nonprofit staff were asked to take on multiple roles and to provide services for clients while additionally providing for their staff's mental health without effective leadership on how to really do so. Additionally, senior staff, who were responding directly to the crisis, left middle management largely on its own to manage staff. Periodic check ins from senior leadership would have made huge, positive differences in providing reassurance, encouragement, and stopping the rumor mill.
- **REGIONAL SUPPORT TO LOCAL BUSINESSES** in a consistent and structured way.
- **ADEQUATE EMERGENCY RESOURCES FOR HOME-BASED STAFF:** Some municipalities like Framingham provided laptops for employees, while others did not. Confidential information like client files are supposed to by law kept under lock and key, which was extremely difficult under home office conditions. Supplying masks and gloves for office work and meeting with clients and setting clear responsibility for who was ordering those materials needed to be clarified.
- **RECOGNITION THAT WORKING FROM HOME = LONGER, MORE STRESSFUL DAYS.** Staff members from many agencies (including municipalities and nonprofits) put in longer days since they were not commuting and were asked to sit in on multiple Zoom calls. Keeping up with emails and Zoom calls takes a toll on home-based workers.

LESSON LEARNED What should the region do to prepare for the next pandemic?

- **IDENTIFY METROWEST REGION & CREATE REGIONAL RESPONSE.** Create defined structure for regional planning or "council of MetroWest towns". This could be built off other state's regional emergency response programs. For example, Connecticut.
- **EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION STRUCTURE** between Senior Leadership and Middle management through intentional periodic check ins.
- **ACT EARLY & DECISIVELY** to limit spread. Denial is deadly. So is an inept response.
- **DEFINE AND DOCUMENT BEST RESPONSES/ BEST PRACTICES** to record, remember, and most importantly, learn from this experience.
- **CREATE EMERGENCY RESOURCES** for staff suddenly forced to work from home
- **PREPARE AN EMERGENCY ACTION PLAN TEMPLATE** that can be rolled out by all towns that will provide guidance for officials, communicate with residents effectively, and provide accurate data and resources, and best practices.
- **LEAD WITH EMPATHY** by acknowledging this is an unprecedented and stressful time. Speak to people, not "at" them. For example, the Prime Minister Arden of New Zealand. Education for management around empathetic leadership would provide long-term benefits during and after the pandemic.
- **SET FAIR EXPECTATIONS** Workers with children told to work at home while workers without children were told to come to work. A big challenge.

- **PRACTICE RECOGNITION OF EVERYONE’S HUMANITY** Recognize employee’s work more quickly and encourage community and collegiality, even at distance. For example, staff gathering for Zoom coffee breaks have helped with morale. “We all need to remember that staff are people too.”

The team would like to thank the following interviewees for their input:

Norman Khumalo, Town Manager, Hopkinton, MA; Timothy M. McDonald, Director of Health and Human Services, Needham, MA