



**ANDREA HARRIS SOCIAL, ECONOMIC,  
ENVIRONMENTAL, AND HEALTH EQUITY  
TASK FORCE  
JUNE 2021 BIENNIAL REPORT**



STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA  
DEPARTMENT OF ADMINISTRATION

ROY COOPER  
GOVERNOR

PAMELA B. CASHWELL  
SECRETARY

Dear Governor Cooper,

As the new Secretary for the Department of Administration (Department), I am honored to chair the Andrea Harris Social, Economic, Environmental and Health Equity Task Force (Task Force). As you know, Ms. Harris was a civil rights activist and icon who dedicated her life to eliminating disparities in North Carolina. Her fight for social, economic, and racial equity for all North Carolinians continues through the work of this Task Force.

The Task Force was established by Executive Order 143 to address the social, environmental, economic, and health disparities in communities of color disproportionately impacted by COVID-19. This biannual report is to provide an update on the work of the Task Force recommendations on the five key focus areas.

In December 2020, under the leadership of Secretary Machel Sanders, the Task Force reported on the establishment of the subcommittees, short and long-term goals, and included recommendations to your office. Among other areas, these recommendations included telemedicine, Medicaid expansion, medical school pipelines, workforce development, improving digital literacy, and support for Federally Qualified Healthcare Centers. Additional details regarding the specific recommendations can be found in the December 2020 Report.

I, along with members of the Task Force, pledge to continue the work of the Task Force. I look forward to working with my colleagues in other cabinet agencies as we all move the recommendations into action.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Pamela B. Cashwell". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Pamela B. Cashwell  
Secretary

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## **2021 Biannual Report Executive Summary**

The Task Force was established June 4, 2020, to create economic stability, eliminate health disparities, and achieve environmental justice in North Carolina by convening testimony, identifying best practices, and reporting findings to the Office of the Governor. The December 2020 Biannual Report was submitted to the Office of the Governor with twenty-one proposed policy recommendations. As required by Executive Order 143, this biannual report provides updates on the implementation of the recommendations.

In the six months since the publication of Task Force’s recommendations, the Office of the Governor, the Department of Administration (DOA), Task Force members, RTI International, and cabinet agencies have worked to begin implementing the prescribed recommendations of the report. Current levers for implementation include but are not limited to: the Governor’s proposed FY 2021-2023 budget, the Governor’s proposed use of state American Rescue Plan dollars, the Governor’s use of Governor Emergency Education Relief (GEER) funds, legislation, agency action, and community engagement.

For this report, Task Force members and staff identified relevant plans, proposals, and actions that align directly with the mission and recommendations of the Task Force. This report is organized by subcommittee topic and provides updates on the efforts of state agencies and subcommittees or other stakeholders to accomplish each recommendation. This report also includes updates from RTI International, which is assisting the Task Force.

# **Andrea Harris Task Force Member List by Subcommittee**

**Chair:** Pamela B. Cashwell, Secretary, NC Department of Administration

## **Access to Healthcare Subcommittee**

Secretary Mandy Cohen  
Dr. Giselle Corbie Smith  
Dr. Catherine Harvey-Sevier  
Andres Henao  
Rep. Donny Lambeth  
Dr. Viviana Martinez-Bianchi,  
Dr. Carlos Rish  
Dr. Christy Clayton

## **Enhanced Patient Engagement Subcommittee**

Cornell Wright  
Eugene Woods  
Fernando Little  
Yazmin Garcia Rico  
Juvencio Rocha Peralta  
Dr. Rhett Brown  
Dr. Cedric Bright  
Dr. Charlene Green  
Dr. John Lumpkin

## **Business Engagement Group**

Justin Truesdale

## **Economic Opportunities & Business Development Subcommittee**

Rep. Yvonne Holley  
Stephanie McGarrah  
C.C. Lambeth  
Dale Jenkins  
Trey Rabon  
Kevin J. Price  
Adriana Chavela  
Walter Baucom  
Lynn Bottone

## **Educational Opportunity Subcommittee**

Pat Martinez  
Dr. Lenora Campbell  
Dr. Sonyia Richardson  
Margaret Weller-Stargell  
Quinny Sanchez Lopez  
Annette Taylor

## **Environmental Justice and Inclusion Subcommittee**

Secretary Elizabeth Biser  
Greg Richardson  
Dr. James H. Johnson Jr.  
Reverend Dr. Jonathan Augustine  
Reverend Dr. T. Anthony Spearman

The following members are no longer on the Task Force.

- \*Secretary Mabelle Sanders (Former Chair)
- \*Benjamin Money
- \*Secretary Michael Regan
- \*Secretary Dionne Delli Gatti



## Liaison/Staff Support List

The following staff members from state agencies support the Task Force subcommittees in their work.

Name	Agency	Subcommittee
<b>Michael Leach*</b>	<b>DHHS</b>	<b>Access to Healthcare</b>
Lakeisha Moore	DHHS	Access to Healthcare
Emma Sandoe	DHHS	Access to Healthcare
<b>Tammie Hall*</b>	<b>DOA</b>	<b>Economic Opportunity and Business Development</b>
Alicia Lyon	DOA	Economic Opportunity and Business Development
Betty Marrow-Taylor	Commerce	Economic Opportunity and Business Development
Jenni Harris	Commerce	Economic Opportunity and Business Development
Tunya Smith	DOT	Economic Opportunity and Business Development
Regina Streaty	OSHR	Economic Opportunity and Business Development
<b>Sa'Metria Jones*</b>	<b>Governor's Office</b>	<b>Educational Opportunity</b>
Judykay Jefferson	Community College System	Educational Opportunity
Jeff Sural	DIT	Educational Opportunity
Timothy Owens	DNCR	Educational Opportunity
Tracey Burns	DNCR	Educational Opportunity
<b>Carolina Fonseca Jimenez*</b>	<b>DEQ</b>	<b>Environmental Justice and Inclusion</b>
Brian Strong	DNCR	Environmental Justice and Inclusion
<b>Catherine Rivera*</b>	<b>DOA</b>	<b>Patient Engagement</b>
Michael J. Arnold	OSBM	Patient Engagement

\*Primary staff liaison member for subcommittee

# **RTI International**

In February 2021, RTI International, an independent nonprofit research organization that uses scientific rigor and technical proficiency to help solve critical problems, was contracted to assist with creating an implementation plan for the Task Force’s recommendations. The RTI team introduced themselves to the Task Force at the March 2021 meeting and provided an overview of their scope of work as the policy implementation coordinators. The following is a list of their work so far:

- Facilitated bi-weekly meetings with Sec. Cashwell and the subcommittee leads.
- Facilitated a prioritization of policy recommendations with Task Force members.
- **Deliverable 1:** Created a policy implementation matrix spreadsheet organizing, classifying, and assigning a preliminary ranking to each of the subcommittee’s policy recommendations according to level of impact, feasibility, and scope.
- **Deliverable 2:** Created a summary document organizing the prioritized policy recommendations in the following two ways:
  - Based on the topic/theme of the policy recommendations.
  - Based on the key stakeholders who would be tasked with implementing the policy recommendations.

## **Status of Implementation Plans**

- The first implementation plan/policy brief is focused on policy recommendations that seek to expand meaningful access to healthcare, in partnership with healthcare organizations and institutions. RTI submitted a draft to the AHTF staff leads June 18, 2021.

Through productive collaboration with subcommittee staff liaisons, RTI incorporated the achievements of each of the subcommittees into the implementation plans and policy briefs. RTI has also prioritized recommendations that can achieve measurable progress in the short-term.

## **Access to Healthcare**

### **Increase opportunities for patients to utilize healthcare services.**

The Governor's 2021-2023 recommended budget directs more than \$250 million in Medicaid resources to address social determinants that contribute to health disparities such as a lack of access to food, quality housing, and reliable transportation. The budget also provides over \$800,000 to expand the Office of Minority Health and Health Disparities to reduce health inequities among racial and ethnic minorities and other underserved populations, and provides \$1.5 million to decrease the impact of implicit bias on students of color and students with disabilities in early childhood.

Governor Cooper's American Rescue Plan proposal strengthens opportunities for children and families to utilize healthcare services. The proposal provides \$23,899,000 to support several initiatives, including: (1) an innovative early childhood cash transfer pilot to direct COVID-19 relief payments to low-income, low-wealth households with one or more very young children; (2) grants to community-based organizations to provide follow-up supports to families with children who screen positive for adverse childhood experiences; (3) support of Prevent Child Abuse NC and other primary prevention activities; and (4) plans to strengthen North Carolina's Child Protective Services (CPS) intake and initial assessment system.

The Governor's American Rescue Plan proposal also includes \$9,332,415 to address non-medical drivers of health, such as access to food, housing, and transportation that can drive negative health outcomes and put people at higher risk for serious illness by maximizing the use of technology to connect people to needed services, providing technical assistance, and issuing 81 draft grants to high-need communities. The proposal also provides \$3,405,810 to support tobacco cessation initiatives and promote tobacco-free policies.

North Carolina Medicaid implemented 125 telehealth provisions since March 2020, which span 482 telehealth codes, to support Medicaid members continuing to receive healthcare remotely during the COVID-19 public health emergency. House Bill 149, "Improving Access to Care Through Telehealth," was filed in February 2021 to expand healthcare benefits plans to cover services through telehealth. As of June 30, 2020, it has passed the House and was referred to the Senate.

### **Appropriate \$1,257,642 in state funds for the Office of Rural Health's Health Information Technology Assistance Program.**

The Office of Rural Health Information Technology Program works directly with NC Safety Net to assess needs and provide technical assistance throughout the state to improve



the use of Electronic Health Records, Telehealth, NCCARE360, and NC HealthConnex. The program was recently awarded a 2-year Center for Disease Control (CDC) grant to assist providers with NCCARE360 implementation and electronic medical record (EMR) integration. The integration will help providers adopt the new technology into their existing EMR workflows.

**Increase investments in rural hospitals, community health centers, and federally qualified health centers (FQHC) to provide quality healthcare, digital literacy training, vaccinations, and vaccination awareness campaigns to increase the number of undocumented, low-income, and other vulnerable patients served and vaccinated.**

The Office of Rural Health (ORH) Information Technology Program partnered with the Department of Information Technology (DIT) to create and pilot a digital and health literacy curriculum with three pilot healthcare entities through a two-year Appalachian Regional Commission grant. One of the outcomes of this grant is a health and digital literacy curriculum shared with the state libraries and other partners to scale this program.

Throughout the pandemic, FQHCs and rural health centers (RHC) have received COVID-19 funding. FQHCs specifically have funding to support care for undocumented, low-income, and other vulnerable patients. In both cases, FQHCs and RHCs, without Medicaid expansion, have a higher number of these patients to serve.

The Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) has also launched several partnerships and campaigns for equitable vaccine outreach. From March to May 2021, NC administered over 1,000,000 COVID-19 vaccine doses at a federally supported vaccination center in Greensboro, where more than 22% of doses went to Black individuals and more than 15% of doses went to people from Hispanic/Latinx communities. DHHS also launched the Health Equity Action Network, a new public private partnership to increase COVID-19 vaccinations among Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) populations. Twenty-seven community-based organizations were selected to receive \$500,000 in grants to support equitable vaccine distribution. The selected organizations will be funded to conduct vaccine outreach and education efforts, schedule appointments, arrange transportation, coordinate local vaccine events at trusted and accessible locations, and provide transportation to second-dose appointments.

NC Medicaid providers can now be reimbursed for up to 15 minutes of preventive medicine counseling and/or risk factor reduction intervention provided to an individual related to COVID-19 vaccination when provided to Medicaid beneficiaries.

In addition to the efforts by the Task Force, North Carolina has been nationally recognized for its vaccine efforts prior to the Duke-Margolis Center and National Governors Association (NGA) report. The CDC ranked the state in the top 10 for equitable vaccine

coverage, and Bloomberg News reported on North Carolina's data-driven approach to reducing disparities in vaccination rates.

For COVID-19 vaccines, North Carolina's work to reach underserved and historically marginalized populations and deliver equitable access has been recognized as a model approach for the country, according to a report by the Duke-Margolis Center for Health Policy and the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices.

The report, *Prioritizing Equity in COVID-19 Vaccinations: Promising Practices from States to Reduce Racial and Ethnic Disparities*, highlights promising actions states can take to promote equitable vaccination within historically marginalized communities, reduce systemic barriers to vaccine access, and improve race and ethnicity data to inform vaccine distribution.

**Increase opportunities for historically marginalized populations to participate in state government affairs to ensure community input in policies to demonstrate transparency and trustworthiness. The composition of state advisory boards should represent 60% of persons with lived experience.**

The Governor's American Rescue Plan proposal provides \$17,593,661 to support approximately 25 community-based and faith-based organizations across the state to develop and implement strategies to advance health equity in historically marginalized communities.

The Department of Transportation has established an Office of Civil Rights Advisory Committee comprised of stakeholders from the community. This committee is designed to provide feedback on departmental performance and objectives and contributes subject matter expertise to the internal leadership team.

The Department of Public Safety has provided local Juvenile Crime Prevention Councils with Racial/Ethnic Disparities Data to utilize in annual planning meetings toward continuing statewide awareness efforts and use for discussions regarding youth most at risk for delinquency and needed/available resources.

**Expand Medicaid.**

Governor Cooper's proposed FY 2021-2023 budget leverages federal dollars provided in the American Rescue Plan, the second federal pandemic relief bill, to expand Medicaid. The North Carolina General Assembly is responsible for allocating and approving how the State will spend federal pandemic relief funds, including as it pertains to Medicaid expansion.

# **Economic Opportunity and Business Development**

## **Create economic incentives to encourage participation with Historically Underutilized Businesses (HUB).**

Through its Historically Underutilized Businesses (HUB) office, the Department of Administration is developing programs that will encourage new and existing corporate partners to support statewide HUB efforts. Additionally, the HUB office is developing new accountability practices for businesses using minority vendors.

The HUB office works closely with the Governor's Advisory Council for Historically Underutilized Businesses to address barriers and identify best practices. Through this collaboration, HUB liaison positions have been established to foster agency relationships with minority and women-owned businesses. Each public university (20) and community college (54) now have identified HUB liaisons that work directly with HUB businesses to educate and train regarding procurement processes.

The Economic Opportunities and Business Development subcommittee has met with and garnered support from the Department of Commerce and the Economic Development Partnership of North Carolina to broaden incentives offered to businesses to include alignment with the State's diversity and inclusion initiatives. These initiatives include support for the utilization of minority and women-owned businesses.

The Department of Commerce included in its Economic Development Strategic Plan support for minority and women-owned businesses. The Plan includes designation of responsibility within the Department of Commerce to help coordinate and implement policies and strategies that encourage women and minority entrepreneurship. Assigning a point person within state government to focus on the issues of women and minority businesses will assist the State in meeting its mission and vision for the Andrea Harris Task Force and ensure progress is being made with the growth and development of these businesses.

The Department of Commerce is committed to the success of North Carolina's women and minority-owned businesses which lead to employment opportunities in underserved communities and revenue growth. Commerce further commits to providing resources to support and enhance the Office for Historically Underutilized Business Program as outlined in the recent [Disparity Study Report](#). The ultimate goal is to drive an inclusive supply chain and vendor opportunities to support all North Carolina businesses with intentional efforts to support HUB businesses.

The Department of Commerce has proposed legislative changes to increase the support to Hubzone-owned businesses, women-owned businesses, and socially and economically disadvantaged businesses. This will diversify and broaden the types of businesses applying

for Small Business Innovative Research (SBIR) and Small Business Technology Transfer (STTR) grants.

A major impediment to success for HUB firms is access to capital. To mitigate the issue during the pandemic, the HUB office created the ReTOOLNC Grant Program. The program offered \$13 million in capital to certified HUB and Disadvantaged Business Enterprises (DBE) firms.

Since the onset of COVID-19, many minority- and women-owned businesses have closed nationwide. According to the Stanford Institute for Economic Policy Research, Black-owned businesses are down 41 percent, Latinx-businesses have declined 32 percent, Asian-owned businesses are down 26 percent, and women-owned businesses have declined 25 percent.

Supporting diversity, equity, and inclusion, ReTOOLNC provided eligible HUB and DBE firms up to \$25,000 in grant funding to help offset costs during the pandemic.

The Governor's 2021-2023 recommended budget funds a position within the HUB office to conduct analyses of contracting practices and provide technical support to agencies. This position will help state agencies increase the participation of minority contractors in construction, goods, and professional services awards. The Governor's 2021-2023 recommended budget also funds the Small Business Enterprise Program and the implementation of additional recommendations from the Disparity Study completed in November 2020. These efforts will help the State address the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on communities of color. Funds will support positions for the Small Business Enterprise Program, program operations, and temporary staffing to address issues from the Disparity Study.

The Governor's American Rescue Plan proposal provides \$50 million to sustain small businesses and HUBs that were adversely impacted by COVID-19. Of these funds, \$40 million will be provided to the Department of Commerce (DOC) to administer a grant program in partnership with The Institute (formerly the North Carolina Institute of Minority Economic Development), the Carolina Small Business Development Fund (CSBDF), and the Economic Development Partnership of North Carolina (EDPNC) Small Business Advisors, to help businesses with fewer than 50 employees and less than \$5 million in annual revenue; \$4 million to EDPNC to develop an initiative that fosters businesses in their second stage of growth; and \$6 million between the Small Business and Technology Development Center (SBTDC) and the Small Business Center Network (SBCN) for business recovery counseling.

**Offer educational support and mentorship to diverse businesses, leverage partnerships with NC HBCUs to develop executive education programs available to minority-owned businesses doing business in the state.**

The HUB Office is further committed to working with Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) to continue partnerships and foster relationships around utilizing minority and women-owned businesses. The work done through economic development initiatives directly correlates with sustainability of diverse firms in and around the communities that house HBCU campuses. The HUB Office will continue to partner with purchasing and contracts departments to heighten visibility for minority and women-owned businesses. Recently, the HUB Office presented to the Fayetteville State University Board of Trustees to continue to build awareness. The HUB Office is slated to participate in additional outreach activities with North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University (NC A&T) and Winston Salem State University (WSSU).

During the height of the pandemic, the HUB Office partnered with the Small Business Administration, Agriculture Department and NC A&T's College of Agriculture to provide a month of education and webinars to the business and farming community in collaboration with the NC A&T Cooperative Extension program. The trainings were conducted as live town halls to address the funding allocated through the Small Business Administration for the business and agriculture industry. The HUB office conducted four weeks of webinars to allow adequate time to address challenges and questions about resources available for the black farming community. HUB trained almost two thousand businesses during this period.

The HUB Office is working collaboratively with the HUB Liaison in the Department of Public Safety (DPS) to identify additional opportunities for the farming community to respond to request for proposals to provide produce to DPS. DPS has hosted a number of workshops/webinars to further educate minority businesses about contracting opportunities.

### **Support apprenticeships and workforce pipelines that create job growth.**

Through its HUB office, the Department of Administration works with the Department of Commerce, Carolina Associated General Contractors, United Minority Contractors, and the NC MWBE Coordinators Network to identify apprenticeship training opportunities. The collaboration includes the development of HUB academies throughout the state to be hosted on HBCU campuses. These academies are concentrated on growing and developing HUB firms in the construction industry. The academies are intended to be eight (8) week programs, one day a week focused on targeted development in a number of skills to include Marketing, Building Information Modeling (BIM), Budgeting, Contracting, Legal and Bonding/Capital Access. The academies will also provide an opportunity to network with private industry to further enhance relationships.

The Department of Commerce, through the NCWorks Commission, is developing the NC Job Ready Workforce Investment Grant, which would provide financial assistance to local workforce boards that implement work-based learning activities.

The Office of State Budget and Management (OSBM) has expanded its traditional 2-school University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill/Duke internship recruitment efforts with an eye toward a more diverse set of applicant pools for professional job recruitment efforts. They are working to increase visibility with NC based HBCUs such as North Carolina Central University (NCCU), WSSU, and other universities with diverse student populations such as the University of North Carolina at Pembroke, the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, and the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, through attending job fairs and posting on specific job boards at those universities.

OSBM is also working to identify diverse professional organizations to assist in agency job postings and increase the number of diverse applicants.

The Department of Natural and Cultural Resources (DNCR) is transferring staff resources toward their Historically Black College or University/Minority Institutions of Higher Education (HBCU/MIHE) internship programs.

DNCR is also implementing the recommendations of a recruitment study to make job postings more attractive and non-restrictive to promote larger and more diverse applicant pools.

DPS has created a law enforcement/emergency management focused HBCU/MSI internship program which provides between eight and ten HBCU students the opportunity to spend a week and a half each with Alcohol Law Enforcement, Community Corrections, Emergency Management, State Bureau of Investigation, State Capitol Police, and the State Highway Patrol.

### **Implement a Tier 1 (prime) and Tier 2 (subcontractor) Subcontracting Plan.**

Through its HUB office, the Department of Administration has created standardized inclusion language for solicitations and is working with the State Purchasing Officer for approval and inclusion into solicitation documents.

A Tier 1 (prime) and Tier 2 (subcontractor) Subcontracting Plan has been developed by the Disparity Study Consultants and is being evaluated by the HUB Office for final review. The Disparity Study identified the need to support mandatory contracting particularly on very large scale opportunities. These industry best practices for subcontracting programs are recommendations to implement for the best results:

- **Benchmarking:** Reviewing historical use of HUB suppliers to determine what types and level of goals should be used. Benchmarking also indicates the types of work that should be subcontracted.
- **Pre-Sourcing:** Determining potential areas for HUB participation and locating potential suppliers to meet them.
- **Multi-Year Contracts:** Using multi-year contracts allows HUB firms to make the necessary investments in staff, technology and infrastructure. This helps them move from tier 2 to tier 1.
- **Mentor-Protégé Programs:** Some government agencies have programs where their tier 1 suppliers can provide targeted assistance to their tier 2 suppliers. In the corporate world, this is referred to as supplier development or mentoring. The Governor’s Advisory Council for Historically Underutilized Businesses is currently developing a model for consideration.
- **Enforcement:** Assigning a departmental HUB liaison to be reviewer of Tier 1 subcontracting plans and their performance during the term of the contract helps ensure actual results are achieved.

Tier 1 suppliers who cannot meet all buying organization subcontracting goals may seek to utilize a phased subcontracting plan. This allows them to develop a subcontracting program and gradually improve their performance over the term of the contract.

## **Educational Opportunity**

**Assist, advocate, and encourage the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (DPI) and other required administrative or academic bodies, to adopt a digital literacy curriculum and toolkit that is accessible to all students and parents in their native language.**

The Educational Opportunity subcommittee secured \$650,000 in funds from the Governor’s Emergency Education Relief (GEER) dollars to expand the Department of Natural and Cultural Resources (DNCR) and the state library’s existing digital literacy toolkit. The subcommittee members reviewed the curriculum material for cultural inclusivity, cultural competency, and accessibility, and presented opportunities for improvement. The members will continue to work with DNCR and the state library to determine the best way to leverage the GEER dollars to expand the toolkit in a manner that intentionally targets and reaches underserved communities.

The Governor’s American Rescue Plan proposal contributes \$165 million to improve awareness and training that enable North Carolinians to realize the benefits of high-speed internet through digital literacy and new skills aimed at accessing the digital economy.

These funds are expected to leverage \$60 million in private and federal funds and will be provided through:

- Device support: provides \$40 million in grant funding for a computer for 96,000 households that lack devices.
- Break-fix services: provides \$30 million in grant funding to provide break-fix services, or as needed services, and replacement for 275,000 devices for low-income North Carolinians.
- Awareness and digital literacy: provides \$95 million in grant funding for awareness campaigns with targeted community-based efforts and digital literacy offerings.

**Advocate for the North Carolina General Assembly to pass a comprehensive budget that includes funding for HB 924, which provides for personal financial literacy for high school students, as well as a similar mandatory requirement for post-secondary institutions.**

The Governor signed HB 924 on July 8, 2019, which, among other things, directed the State Board of Education (State Board) to revise the K-12 social studies standards to require state public schools to teach a full-credit course focused solely on Economics and Personal Finance. The State Board adopted updated K-12 social studies standards on February 4, 2021, and includes the personal financial literacy course required in HB 924. HB 924 also requires grants-in-aid to be made available to the North Carolina Council on Economic Education from funds appropriated to the Department of Public Instruction for teacher professional development in economics and personal financial literacy. HB 966 included funding for this professional development. Because HB 966 was vetoed as part of the budget impasse, the funding was never appropriated.

**Support community health centers by implementing telehealth and telemedicine initiatives, including, but not limited to, ensuring adequate funding for health education and partnering with State agencies and other groups that share similar goals of increasing broadband access and addressing health literacy.**

The Governor's 2021-2023 recommended budget and ARP proposal provides funding for broadband and telehealth, respectively. The subcommittee will continue to review the best way for the Governor and the State of North Carolina to support community health centers and will consider more concrete policy or programmatic solutions to fulfill this recommendation.

**Establish a statewide health literacy coordinating council and corresponding regional health literacy councils as consistent with the Area Health Education model.**

The subcommittee remains committed to this recommendation and is still seeking the most appropriate policy approach to fulfill this recommendation.



## **Environmental Justice & Inclusion**

**Support the creation of environmental justice, equity and inclusion positions at the Department of Commerce, Transportation, Natural and Cultural Resources and the Division of Emergency Management and consider other agencies where such positions might benefit community access to State decision-making.**

The Governor's 2021-2023 recommended budget funds four positions to serve as environmental justice, equity, and inclusion coordinator at four cabinet agencies. These positions will complete analyses to better understand how each agency's work impacts underserved communities through an environmental justice and equity lens and ensure that North Carolina communities have a clear point of contact, thereby increasing transparency of these efforts.

Progress toward establishing these positions includes:

- **DOT** created a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Advisory Group and submitted a position description for realignment and integration of environmental justice duties into a current full-time position.
- **The Department of Commerce** created a Chief Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Officer position and has plans to hire several staff positions to create a new DEI Office, which will report to the Chief Officer.
- **DNCR** elevated the Assistant Secretary of Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, and Inclusion to Deputy Secretary.
- **DNCR** is transferring one full-time position and a temporary position from their HR office to a DEI office to dedicate resources toward their internship programs and expand DEI efforts.
- **DPS Emergency Management** is creating a bilingual Voluntary Agency Liaison position, which will focus on developing more effective working relationships with organizations that serve primarily or exclusively Spanish-speaking populations.

In addition to the Governor's funding recommendation, several cabinet agencies have already taken steps to create and elevate full-time positions that focus on various aspects of diversity, equity, and inclusion. Examples of these efforts include the following:

- **The Governor's Office** created a Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion position to monitor DEI priorities in policy, program, and outreach efforts across the state by coordinating with liaisons from cabinet agencies.

- **The Department of Administration** added diversity, equity, and inclusion to the Deputy Secretary and Policy Director’s duties to synchronize DEI efforts throughout the Department.
- **DHHS** has created a Chief Equity Officer who reports directly to Secretary Cohen, Director of Diversity and Inclusion, Equity and Inclusion Director of Facilities positions, a Director of Latinx Policy, and has stood up a health equity office.
- **The Office of State Human Resources** is creating a Diversity and Inclusion Director position in addition to their existing EEO position. They also plan to expand the role of a senior director with oversight of the diversity and workforce program to have broad diversity, equity, and inclusion responsibilities.

**Utilize existing training and incentive programs to create jobs initiatives in disadvantaged communities geared toward remediation and resiliency work on public and low-income buildings in those communities, with a specific focus on public schools within the demonstration sites of Robeson and Edgecombe counties.**

The subcommittee team lead is currently in conversations with the Robeson County and Edgecombe County superintendents and evaluating various programs at community colleges that may contribute to job creation in remediation and resiliency in disadvantaged communities. The subcommittee members continue to discuss possible ways to expand the workforce in the identified occupations required to transform sick school buildings into green facilities by expanding existing new green jobs training and certification programs offered in community colleges.

The subcommittee is submitting a grant proposal for funding to further research the demonstration sites of Robeson and Edgecombe counties.

**Support funding the efforts to remediate the environmental issues in public schools.**

The Task Force is currently seeking solutions in this area.

**Support expansion of the inventory and remediation process demonstrated by Short-Term Goal 2 to include other types of infrastructure, such as housing, courthouses, and other public buildings in environmental justice communities.**

The subcommittee is submitting a grant proposal that will support expanding the current list of the inventory and remediation process.

**Support a legislative strategy for changes to create a standard environmental justice review process for State projects.**

The subcommittee and the Department of Environmental Quality are conducting listening sessions with stakeholders to shape a potential legislative strategy.

## **Patient Engagement**

**Establish mandatory, uniformed cultural methods of collecting demographic patient information, including but not limited to race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, across all healthcare systems.**

DHHS currently requires COVID-19 vendors to capture demographic data.

In June, Dr. Rhett Brown, who is a Family Medicine Specialist at Novant Health, and a member of this subcommittee, presented to the AHTF about the challenges LGBTQ+ patients encounter in healthcare and best practices to better serve this community. The Task Force is still seeking additional solutions in this area.

**Increase funding to strengthen the capacity of federally qualified health centers (FQHCs) to increase numbers of undocumented, low-income, and other vulnerable patients served.**

DHHS and NC Counts Coalition launched a public-private partnership called the Healthier Together: Health Equity Action Network (Healthier Together). Healthier Together invited organizations committed to ensuring equitable COVID-19 vaccine distribution to apply for grants in the range of \$7,000-\$20,000 for individual organizations, and collaborative proposals for larger amounts were considered up to \$50,000.

The funds support communities that experience health inequities and are to ensure individuals from historically marginalized populations are able to access vaccines in their areas. The activities funded include conducting vaccine outreach and education efforts, helping people schedule appointments, arranging transportation, coordinating local vaccine events at trusted and accessible locations, and ensuring that people get to second-dose appointments.

In addition to providing grants to community-based organizations, the Healthier Together initiative includes regional health equity teams that will support vaccine outreach and education efforts, use vaccination data to inform planning and investment of resources and help match vaccine providers with community-based organizations.

**Expand Medicaid in North Carolina.**

The Governor's 2021-2023 FY recommended budget includes Medicaid Expansion. As a provision in the American Rescue Plan, the federal government will allocate \$1.7 billion to states that have yet to expand Medicaid.

## Ensure and strengthen medical sick leave policies for essential workers, particularly those with historically marginalized backgrounds.

The Task Force is seeking solutions in this area.

## Strengthen medical school admission pipeline programs for students of color.

The subcommittee determined that a pathway program should be developed to help pipeline HBCU students into medical school. The program's pilot would originate at North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University. This framework was presented to the Task Force at the May 2021 Task Force Meeting.

## Additional Operations

In addition to the initiatives previously mentioned, several actions from the Office of the Governor and cabinet agencies support efforts to promote equitable outcomes for North Carolinians. Although they do not address specific recommendations from the subcommittees, the following actions align with the overall mission of the Task Force.

### Office of the Governor

- In May, the Governor directed \$51.4 million of North Carolina's share of Governor Emergency Education Relief (GEER) Fund to several programs that help students access and complete post-secondary education, including the following:
  - \$31.5 million to launch the Longleaf Commitment program. Longleaf Commitment guarantees that 2020-2021 graduating high school seniors from low-and middle-income families receive at least \$2,800 in federal and state grants for tuition and fees at any of the state's 58 community colleges for the 2021-22 and 2022-23 academic years.
  - \$12.5 million to launch the Longleaf Complete program to help the UNC System, NC Community College System, and independent colleges and universities provide financial aid or expand student support as needed to help students whose education has been interrupted during the pandemic complete their degrees.
  - \$825,000 to Communities in Schools (CIS) to support and expand the Jobs for North Carolina Graduates Program (JNCG). JNCG is an NC Job Ready Initiative that teaches 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade high school students employability and workplace skills in preparation for the workforce post-graduation. The program currently operates at eight high schools in mostly rural counties in North Carolina.
- The Governor's Task Force to Develop a Representative and Inclusive Vision for Education (DRIVE) submitted its 2021 report with 10 recommendations and 46

strategies to diversify the educator workforce in North Carolina’s public schools. In addition to identifying key stakeholders, the DRIVE Report addresses the importance of prioritizing the recruitment, preparation, support, and retention of educators of color. The DRIVE Task Force, which was established through Executive Order 113, is currently considering its next steps as a collective body to move the recommendations into action.

### **Department of Transportation (DOT)**

- DOT has a DEI Advisory Group charged with building, fostering, and achieving a robust and full spectrum “Transportation Diversity” program and seeks to integrate DEI in all transportation programs and services.
- DOT Office of Civil Rights has a Diversity Spend Committee which assesses barriers to diverse utilization and accountability to meet NC DOT’s diversity-business spending goals. In addition, this committee manages and monitors comprehensive Diversity Spend reports to benchmark and capture real-time diversity spending rates to increase diverse utilization.

### **Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ)**

- DEQ has an Environmental Justice and Equity Advisory Board that helps maintain the fair and equal treatment and meaningful involvement of North Carolinians regardless of race, color, national origin, or income regarding the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies.
- DEQ has a Diversity and Inclusion Committee (established in 2018) that serves as a communication link between managers and employees and the Human Resources/EEO and Inclusion area regarding the organizational climate and employee concerns as it relates to equity and diversity issues. The committee also assists DEQ in its efforts to promote cultural competency and diversity initiatives throughout the Department.

### **Department of Commerce**

- The Department has created strategic plan goals towards achieving cultural transformation, including creating an employee engagement council, delivery of DEI training, improved processing systems, and enhanced procedures to recruit more highly qualified and diverse job applicants.

### **Office of State Budget and Management (OSBM)**

- OSBM has a Recruitment Cross Functional team (established 2019-2020) which has added new goals to increase the number of diverse candidates who apply to and are hired by OSBM.

- OSBM has created strategic plan goals to increase diversity and cultural awareness in their 2021-2023 plan.

### **Department of Natural and Cultural Resources (DNCR)**

- DNCR Museum of Art and NC Symphony have each created an internal Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Accessibility task force to review policies, procedures, and practices with the goal of increasing the demographic representation and amplifying the voices of people of color, people with disabilities, and others.
- DNCR Arts Council has expanded its grant program to support Diversity, Equity Accessibility and Inclusion (DEAI) and will award grants to organizations that are doing important work in communities of color, disability communities, and rural communities.

### **Department of Public Safety (DPS)**

- DPS Juvenile Justice is securing external research agreements to conduct and/or facilitate race and ethnicity analysis across decision points, in schools, and throughout the continuum of services to advise policies.
- DPS Juvenile Justice has developed a housing policy to guide the management of juveniles housed in a juvenile detention center or youth development center who identify as LGBTQI+. Training to complement the LGBTQI+ housing policy, to include a focus on an understanding of the LGBTQI+ community, the nuance of gender identity and sexual orientation, and research and best practices surrounding interactions with LGBTQI+ youth has been implemented. A policy that provides guidance for the service planning of juveniles who are under the supervision of Juvenile Court Services and identify as being on the LGBTQI+ spectrum is in development and related training planned.

### **Department of Information Technology (DIT)**

- The Department has partnered with DHHS to establish and fund (from grants from the Appalachian Regional Commission and the Dogwood Health Trust) three telehealth pilot programs in counties in Western North Carolina. They are currently working with those counties to purchase equipment.
- DIT has partnered with DigitalCharlotte to conduct the Digital Literacy training for healthcare providers at the safety net sites.
- DIT is also working closely with NCWorks to establish a central web page to catalog all of the available resources to job seekers, including links to digital literacy training opportunities.

## **Conclusion**

For the last six months, the Task Force, Governor's Office, and cabinet agencies have started the hard work to implement the 2020 Policy Recommendations.

Keeping Governor Cooper's budget priorities in perspective, agencies are formulating plans of action for implementation and working internally and externally to accomplish many of the goals set out in the recommendations.

We look forward to the continued progress of the Andrea Harris Social, Economic, Environmental and Health Equity Task Force.

## About Andrea Harris

*“We need to make sure we always have people at the table who are most affected.” –Andrea Harris (2019)*

The Andrea Harris Social, Economic, Environmental, and Health Equity Task Force is named in honor of the late Andrea Harris. A native North Carolinian, the late Andrea Harris was a trailblazer for minority businesses and communities. Harris graduated from Bennett College and became one of the youngest community agency directors in the nation, helping fight poverty across three rural North Carolina communities. With an unwavering passion for helping others in need, she co-founded the NC Institute of Minority Economic Development in 1986, where she served as president in 1990. Located in the heart of Durham, the Institute supports minority and women-owned businesses. Harris was named the Lifetime Achievement Winner in Triangle Business Journal’s Leaders in Diversity Awards in 2014 and retired from the Institute that same year. After retiring from the Institute, Harris continued to serve on several boards, including the State’s Advisory Council for Historically Underutilized Businesses, where she was appointed in 2017. She is a recipient of numerous awards and honors, including the Order of the Long Leaf Pine, the highest award for state service granted by the Office of the Governor, as well as an honorary doctorate from her alma mater, Bennett College.

