

A priority becomes policy

Following the release in 2015 of CDS-led reports that [identified troubling gaps](#) in health care and health outcomes for people with disabilities—and that [recommended ways to close them](#)—[Delaware Health and Social Services \(DHSS\)](#) Secretary Rita Landgraf vowed to make health equity a departmental priority. DHSS “needed to actively engage to address inclusion and access to meaningful healthcare,” she says. That priority has now become policy.

The [DHSS inclusion policy](#) aims to standardize practices that raise consciousness about disability among DHSS staff and vendors who want to do business with the state health department, in order to better serve the needs of vulnerable populations. The policy sets out to achieve this by providing trainings and direct assistance to DHSS staff and prospective vendors, providing accommodations and removing barriers in DHSS programs, incorporating a requirement to address vulnerable populations into Request For Proposal (RFP) language and collecting disability statistics to quantify the success of the policy in addressing health equity.

CDS has been offering the kinds of trainings that are expected to become commonplace at DHSS. One of those trainings was recently provided to the [Division of Public Health's Office of Preparedness](#). That office's director, [Tim Cooper](#), had wanted his staff of more than 250 to receive lessons in inclusiveness, such as using assistive technology and better communication techniques in disaster situations. His staff had lacked some resources to serve this population, he says.

Expanded trainings like these, says [CDS Project Director Eileen Sparling](#), can “quickly get people from awareness to changing practices” at a department-wide level.

Landgraf hopes that progress will continue under the new administration of [Gov. John Carney](#). DHSS “must set an example,” Landgraf says, “so the needs of people with disabilities are not forgotten.”



Eileen Sparling addresses DHSS employees during a CDS training session on inclusiveness.