

First Health Equity Officer Hired By State

By Administrator

Monday, 20 September 2021 16:41 -

The North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) today announced the hiring of Victor Armstrong as the Department's first ever Chief Health Equity Officer. NCDHHS created the position as well as the Office of Health Equity to lead its focus to advance health equity and reduce disparities in opportunity and outcomes for historically marginalized populations.

"Today's announcement marks another step forward in our commitment to embed equity into every aspect of our work and to promote an inclusive, equitable workplace that reflects the communities we serve, where everyone feels a sense of belonging, and our diverse backgrounds and experiences are valued and recognized as strengths," said DHHS Secretary Mandy K. Cohen, M.D. "We are fortunate to bring on two leaders with tremendous talent, experience, and dedication to public service."

As Chief Health Equity Officer, Armstrong will serve as a member of the Department's executive leadership team and will lead the Department's overarching strategy and operational goals to promote health equity, diversity, and inclusion across all DHHS health and human services. He will be responsible for developing, implementing, facilitating, and embedding health equity strategic initiatives into every aspect of DHHS' programs, services, actions, outcomes and internal employee culture; as well as overseeing the Office of Health Equity, Office of Rural Health, and the Office of Diversity and Inclusion.

"I feel honored to be stepping into the Chief Health Equity Officer role, particularly when a focus on health equity is so badly needed, and I applaud Governor Cooper and Secretary Cohen for taking the initiative to create such a position," said Armstrong. "Health equity only exists when all people have the opportunity to attain their full health potential, and no one is disadvantaged because of their social position or other socially determined circumstance. We only arrive at health equity through intentionality."

Armstrong is a current member of the DHHS team, having joined the Department in March 2020 as Director of the NC Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities, Substance Abuse Services. He has over 30 years of experience in human services, primarily dedicated to building and strengthening community resources to serve historically marginalized individuals and communities. Armstrong is a nationally recognized speaker on issues regarding health equity and access to healthcare, particularly as it relates to individuals living with mental health challenges.

In addition to the Chief Health Equity Officer, DHHS also welcomes a new Assistant Secretary of Equity and Inclusion. Former State Senator Angela Bryant will work hand in hand with Armstrong to develop, operationalize, and evaluate the Department's healthy equity work. She also will lead the Department's internal diversity and inclusion work overseeing the Office of Diversity and Inclusion, as well as stakeholder engagement with community stakeholders.

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“This is a very urgent time to focus our resources on maximizing health and wellness for all North Carolinians. I am pleased to be a part of this DHHS team, with Chief Armstrong, to work on the in-depth collaborations that will be needed to accomplish the serious and complex goals needed, both internally and externally, to advance health equity,” said Senator Bryant.

Senator Bryant served in the NC General Assembly representing various configurations of Halifax, Vance, Warren, Franklin and parts of Wilson and Nash Counties from 2007 to 2018. In addition to serving as an elected official, she has dedicated her career to supporting a broad range of organizations in creating welcoming and successful environments for all cultural groups. She co-founded Visions, Inc. – a non-profit educational organization that has provided diversity and inclusion services to over 100,000 individuals and 600 organizations, including health care organizations and staff – with the mission to empower the creation of environments where differences are recognized, understood, and appreciated.