

HHS Secretary Cohen To Step Down At The End Of The Year

By Administrator

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North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (NCDHHS) Secretary Mandy K. Cohen, M.D. will be stepping down from the agency after 5 years of service to the state. Governor Cooper has appointed Kody Kinsley, current NCDHHS Chief Deputy Secretary for Health and lead for COVID operations, to succeed her beginning January 1st. “Mandy Cohen has shown extraordinary leadership during her tenure and she has worked every day during this pandemic to help keep North Carolinians healthy and safe,” said Governor Roy Cooper. “We are stronger because of her efforts and I am enormously grateful for her service. She has built a remarkable team of talented people including Kody Kinsley, and I know he will continue the strong legacy of competence, effectiveness and efficiency as he takes over as Secretary.”

Secretary Cohen, an internal medicine physician, was appointed by Governor Cooper in January of 2017 and has served as Secretary of DHHS leading the state during some of the most challenging times in North Carolina history. She has led the state’s response to COVID-19 and served as Governor Cooper’s chief advisor and strategist on beating the pandemic.

“It has been the honor of a lifetime to serve this state at such an important moment in history,” said Dr. Mandy Cohen. “I am grateful for Governor Cooper’s leadership, and I am so proud of what we have accomplished to improve the health and well-being of the state over the last five years. There is much work still to do, and I am so pleased the Governor selected Kody Kinsley to take the baton to run the next leg of this race.”

Under Dr. Cohen’s leadership, North Carolina has been a model for best practices to provide equitable access to COVID-19 testing and support to families so that they could safely quarantine and isolate; been recognized as best in the nation for data quality for vaccinations by race and ethnicity; and eliminated a vaccination gap between Hispanic and non-Hispanic North Carolinians and narrowed the gap for Black/African American communities.

Secretary Cohen has been lauded for her outstanding leadership during the COVID crisis. In September of 2020, Secretary Cohen was awarded the Leadership in Public Health Practice Award from Harvard University’s T.H. Chan School of Public Health. She was named the 2020 Tar Heel of the Year by the Raleigh News and Observer newspaper and Dr. Cohen was also elected to the National Academy of Medicine in 2021.

In addition to her COVID response leadership, Secretary Cohen and her team successfully launched Medicaid managed care, receiving national recognition for the state’s innovative approach to whole-person care, including the integration of physical and mental health and

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using Medicaid to address drivers of health such as housing, transportation, and employment. Under Secretary Cohen's leadership, NCDHHS hired its first Chief Health Equity Officer and has focused on reducing disparities in opportunity and outcomes for historically marginalized populations. In addition, North Carolina implemented the first-in-the-nation statewide coordinated care network, NCCARE360, to electronically connect those with identified needs to community resources. This private-public partnership has been a key feature of NC's COVID response and backbone to the innovative Health Opportunities pilot authorized under North Carolina's 1115 Medicaid waiver.

Dr. Cohen is leaving DHHS in a strong position to continue to carry out its mission, Cooper said. Dr. Cohen plans to spend more time with her family while exploring new opportunities to carry on her work improving the health and well-being of communities.

Kody H. Kinsley, a native of Wilmington, NC, currently serves as the Chief Deputy Secretary for Health at NCDHHS and Operations Lead for NC's COVID-19 pandemic response. During his nearly four years of service at NCDHHS, Kinsley has overseen the state's response to the Opioid Epidemic; increased investments in services and supports for individuals with behavioral health needs and developmental disabilities; created strategic interventions to transition justice-involved populations to care; and has been a driving force behind the state's COVID-19 pandemic response, including North Carolina's vaccine distribution efforts.

Kinsley returned home to North Carolina after serving as the presidentially appointed Assistant Secretary for Management at the U.S. Department of the Treasury where he led operations and finances for the cabinet-level agency, a position he held during both the Obama and Trump Administrations. He has also held roles at the White House and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Kinsley is a recipient of SEANC's Unsung Hero Award, the Alexander Hamilton Award, and is a member of the Aspen Global Leadership Network. He received his Bachelor of Arts Degree from Brevard College in Brevard, NC and a Master of Public Policy from the Goldman School at the University of California at Berkeley.