

NORTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

IMMUNIZATION BRANCH

STRATEGIC PLAN 2023 - 2030



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OUR ROLE IN THE DHHS MISSION

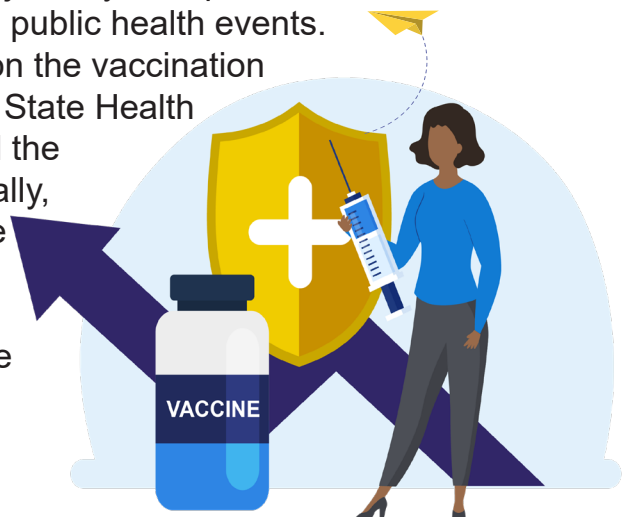
OUR ROLE

The Immunization Branch is part of the Division of Public Health (DPH) within the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). As such, the Immunization Branch plays an integral role in fulfilling the DHHS mission by working with local governments, school and community leaders, and healthcare providers across the state to promote public health and ensure equitable access to vaccines.

Through these efforts, the Immunization Branch has supported the administration of over 19 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines, resulting in 66.6% of the eligible population in North Carolina having completed their primary vaccination series as of December 2022¹. Our work to combat the pandemic illustrates the magnitude of the Branch's efforts in supporting immunizations for all vaccine preventable diseases to effectively increase life expectancy across the state.

This strategic plan outlines our renewed purpose, focus areas, and priority initiatives to integrate the lessons learned and enhanced capabilities built during the COVID-19 pandemic. We are committed to continuing our journey to improve routine vaccination coverage and maintain preparedness for future public health events.

This plan is complimentary to and expands upon the vaccination goals and efforts outlined in the North Carolina State Health Improvement Plan², Healthy People 2030³, and the NC DHHS 2021-2023 Strategic Plan⁴. Specifically, we aim to increase vaccination rates state-wide as outlined in the Healthy People 2030 plan and increase overall life expectancy by reducing deaths caused by vaccine preventable diseases as outlined in the State Health Improvement Plan.



1 covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker

2 schs.dph.ncdhhs.gov/units/ldas/docs/SHIP-REPORT-Final

3 nciom.org/healthy-north-carolina-2030/

4 ncdhhs.gov/media/13331/download?attachment

OUR PURPOSE

The Immunization Branch has developed a purpose statement to reflect the passion, commitment, and alignment of our people.

Protecting the health, safety, and well-being of all people in North Carolina by **ensuring** equitable access to vaccines and **empowering** our partners with trusted, reliable information and support services in the ongoing fight against vaccine-preventable disease.



Protecting:

Developing and promoting immunization programs for infants, children, adolescents, and adults to prevent future outbreaks and respond to public health threats



Ensuring:

Improving the access to, acceptability of, and confidence in immunizations



Empowering:

Building trust and confidence by providing timely, credible, and culturally-sensitive information to residents, health care providers, and other partners

IMMUNIZATION BRANCH 2023 – 2030 STRATEGIC PLAN

To achieve our purpose, the Immunization Branch has undertaken a rigorous and collaborative process to define our 2023 – 2030 strategic plan. This process involved interviews, workshops, and analysis across the Branch and DPH, as well as external perspectives from healthcare providers across North Carolina and public health leaders from other states. Together, we defined five strategic focus areas and identified twenty-three priority initiatives for the Branch over the next several years.

OUR STRATEGIC FOCUS AREAS

These five focus areas will serve as the pillars of our strategic plan:



Readiness



Continuous
Improvement



Culture and
Capabilities

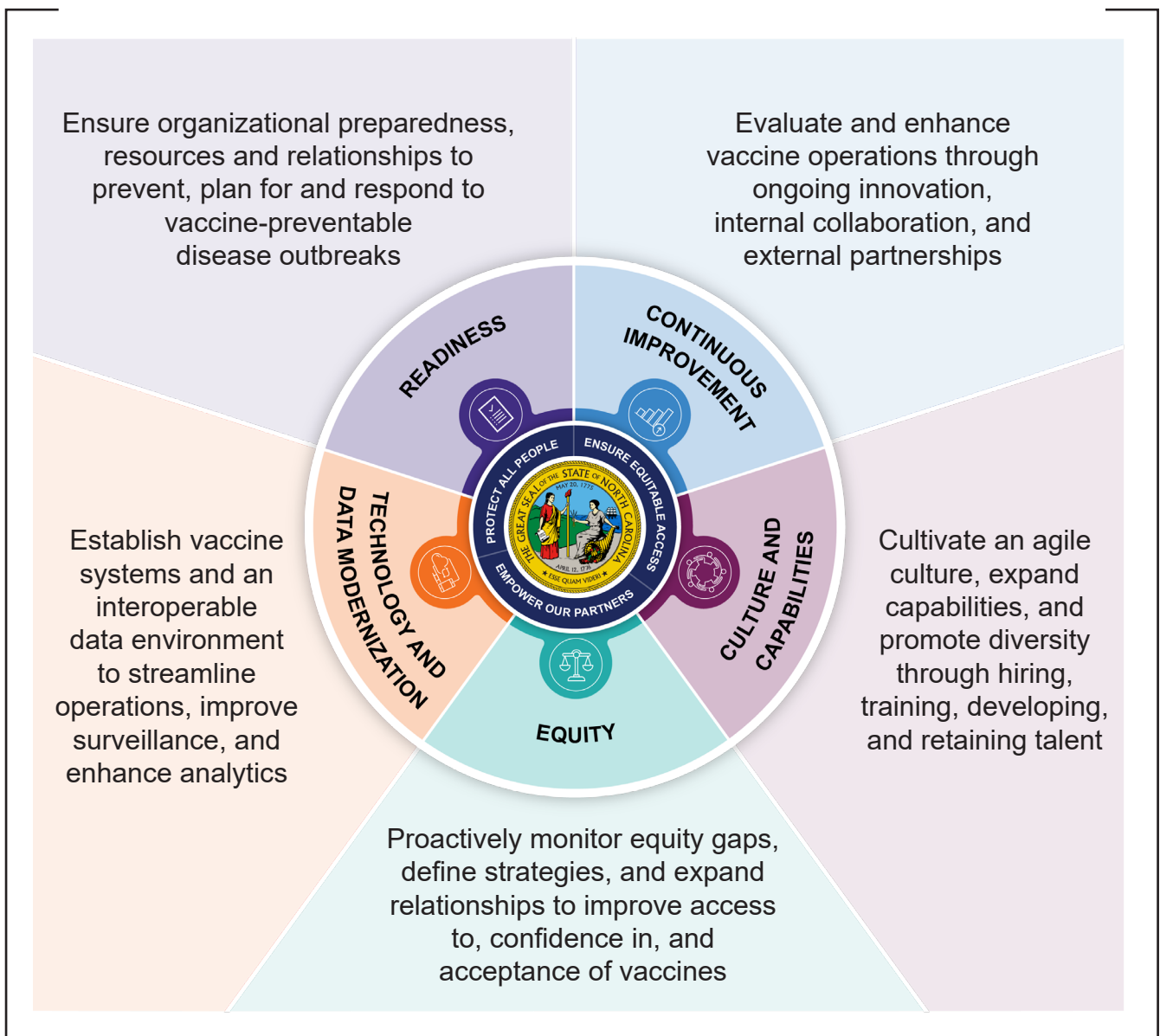


Equity



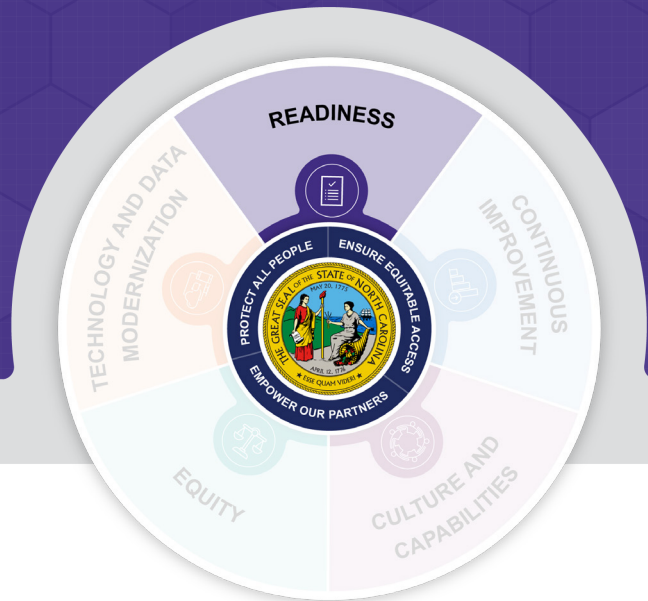
Technology
and Data
Modernization

Defining Our Strategic Focus Areas



These strategic focus areas reflect our priorities for the future of the Immunization Branch. The subsequent pages in this document further elaborate on our objectives and initiatives within each of these focus areas.

READINESS



Ensure organizational preparedness, resources, and relationships to prevent, plan for, and respond to vaccine-preventable disease outbreaks

Organizational readiness for new and emerging public health emergencies is an integral component of the Immunization Branch purpose and strategic plan. Through the **Readiness** pillar of our strategic plan, the Immunization Branch has embarked on a journey to integrate new capabilities built across our organization during the pandemic. While the Branch will continue to facilitate preventative vaccinations against known diseases, an increased focus on Readiness will enhance our ability to quickly mobilize and scale operations in response to disease outbreaks.

Our Readiness Initiatives

1

Develop and Maintain an Immunization Branch Emergency Response Plan

2

Expand Immunization Branch Emergency Response Training

3

Embed After-Action Reviews

4

Leverage Surveillance and Prevention Infrastructure

5

Build and Maintain Partnerships

Readiness Initiatives

1 **Develop and Maintain an Immunization Branch Emergency Response Plan:** *Develop an emergency response plan to ensure organizational preparedness to respond to outbreaks and public health events involving vaccines*

- 1.1 Develop and maintain an Immunization Branch emergency response plan with a clearly defined emergency structure, complete with roles and responsibilities
- 1.2 Develop and maintain a branch-wide accountability chart to facilitate the transition from day-to-day to emergency response roles
- 1.3 Periodically review and refine the Immunization Branch emergency response plan with Public Health Preparedness and Response (PHP&R) and the broader Epidemiology Section to ensure coordination, visibility, and organizational preparedness
- 1.4 Review and embed external leading practices into the Immunization Branch emergency response plan to ensure a best-in-class and up-to-date approach for responding to public health events involving vaccines

2 **Expand Immunization Branch Emergency Response Training:** *Develop and implement training for staff and providers to ensure readiness for public health emergencies and unexpected events involving vaccines*

- 2.1 Establish an Immunization Branch incident-management team that meets annually to assess and update relevant trainings to supplement CDC requirements
- 2.2 Conduct semi-annual table-top exercises to train both Immunization Branch and broader Epidemiology Section team members on effective practices and communication channels during public health events
- 2.3 Develop an agile workforce by cross-training Immunization Branch staff in relevant functions to maintain flexibility in emergency situations
- 2.4 Regularly inform providers on latest branch-specific emergency response plans and provide updated trainings for associated actions

3 **Embed After-Action Reviews:** *Develop and implement a systematic after-action review process to integrate lessons learned from public health events into Immunization Branch activities*

- 3.1 Develop a formalized after-action review process to document, distribute, and incorporate lessons learned immediately after public health events to continually update the Immunization Branch emergency response plan
- 3.2 Establish and maintain a shared Immunization Branch knowledge repository for after-action review findings

4 **Leverage Surveillance and Prevention Infrastructure:** *Coalesce monitoring, surveillance, and immunization data to enhance prevention and response efforts*

- 4.1 Leverage Epidemiology Section surveillance trends and findings to monitor and support potential outbreak response efforts (i.e., integrated NC EDSS/NCIR)
- 4.2 Analyze county-level risk reports using vaccine coverage data to identify high-risk populations and determine immunization needs

5 **Build and Maintain Partnerships:** *Establish a network of internal and external partnerships to advance Immunization Branch emergency response efforts*

- 5.1 Maintain a repository of individuals across DPH with broad and transferable skillsets to Immunization Branch operations to help with surge capacity
- 5.2 Identify a list of individuals and organizations (i.e., professional organizations, community-based organizations, vendors) within the community with the skills and/or certifications to help support immunization efforts to meet increased demand
- 5.3 Establish bi-annual updates with professional boards (i.e., nursing and pharmacy boards) to maintain a network with skilled professionals and align on vaccine readiness strategies
- 5.4 Regularly assess and build relationships/contracts with external parties to utilize for Immunization Branch emergency response



CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT



Evaluate and enhance vaccine operations through ongoing innovation, internal collaboration, and external partnerships

The Immunization Branch has identified **Continuous Improvement** as a pillar of its strategic plan. The Immunization Branch must engage in regular analysis of its processes, technologies, internal capabilities, and external partnerships to ensure its services and information are being effectively and efficiently delivered to the community. Continuous Improvement will translate to better access to information and improved vaccine coverage across the State.

Our Continuous Improvement Initiatives

1 Improve Immunization Branch Processes

2 Establish Key Performance Indicators

3 Improve Experience Design

4 Define Governance Model



Continuous Improvement Initiatives

1 **Improve Immunization Branch Processes:** *Document, assess, and improve operational processes based on internal and external leading practices and feedback sessions*

- 1.1 Document and maintain all current branch-wide processes on a bi-annual basis
- 1.2 Design and implement an innovation process to prioritize potential improvements and emerging technology capabilities for the Immunization Branch beyond CDC requirements
- 1.3 Establish bi-annual feedback sessions with relevant external parties (i.e., North Carolina's Communicable Disease Branch (CDB), CDC project officer, FEMA, providers, recipients) to identify areas for improvement and external best practices related to immunization efforts

2 **Establish Key Performance Indicators:** *Identify improvement opportunities through key performance indicators (KPIs), tools, and methods for vaccine data monitoring*

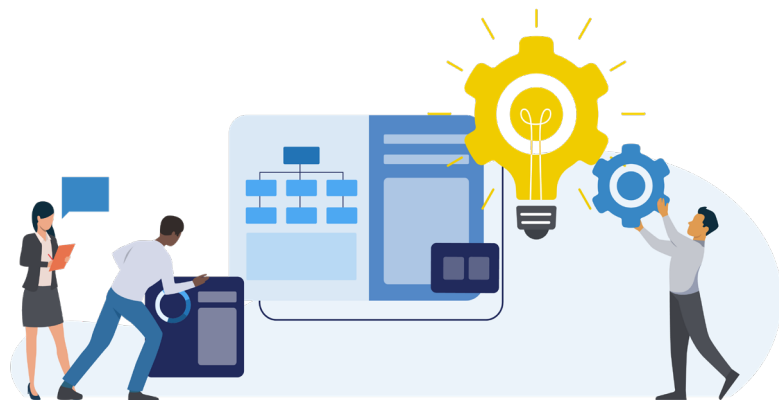
- 2.1 At each functional unit, define and align on key performance indicators representative of operational performance and vaccine objectives
- 2.2 Define a process and reporting structure for vaccine data collection and standardization to monitor KPIs across the branch

3 **Improve Experience Design:** *Identify, design, communicate, and implement opportunities to improve VPD awareness and enhance the provider and resident experience*

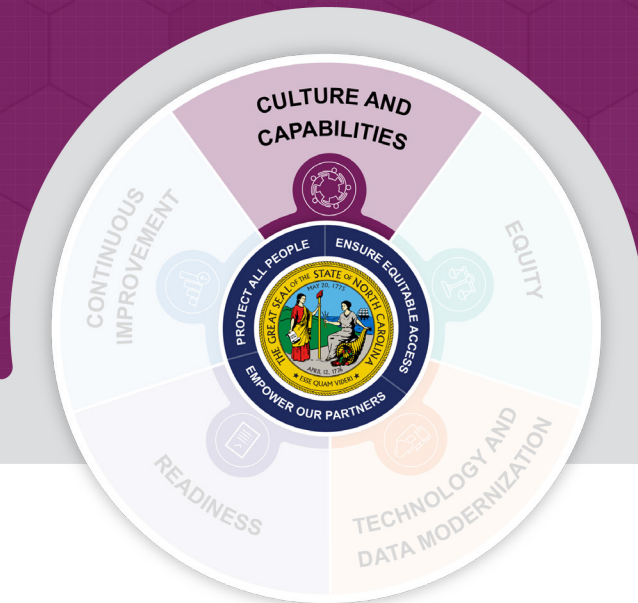
- 3.1 Collaborate with Education, Outreach, and Communications Team to conduct, at a minimum, bi-annual provider satisfaction surveys and semi-annual process reviews to ensure provider needs and suggestions are incorporated and realized
- 3.2 Develop an external partner ecosystem and improve communication channels and capabilities to further support Immunization Branch interactions with providers and recipients
- 3.3 Evaluate and implement changes to the Immunization Quality Improvement for Providers (IQIP) program that is supplemental to CDC requirements and tailors strategies to specific population needs and vaccine coverage rate(s)

4 **Define Governance Model:** *Implement a structured governance and reporting model to ensure alignment on branch-specific activities and resource needs for evolving strategic priorities*

- 4.1 Present timely updates on DPH and/or Epidemiology all-hands calls to share progress, highlight challenges, and showcase immunization data to increase awareness and improve collaboration across the section (i.e., integration with the Communicable Disease Branch teams)
- 4.2 Define and implement a systematic process to ensure compliance with CDC grant activities and ensure grant deliverables are met by the Immunization Branch (i.e., cooperative agreement)
- 4.3 Develop and implement an annual planning process with quarterly updates to align both Immunization Branch (L1) spending and external allocation and usage of funds at the local level
- 4.4 Collaborate with the DPH, at a minimum, on a quarterly basis to understand priorities and processes around new and existing funding opportunities (ex. federal grants, foundations, joint-funding sources, etc.) to support vaccination efforts



CULTURE AND CAPABILITIES



Cultivate an agile culture, expand capabilities, and promote diversity through hiring, training, developing, and retaining talent

As a public health organization, the Immunization Branch must adopt strategies to ensure the workforce is flexible, responsive, and well-equipped to efficiently and effectively address routine vaccinations and future public health events. As a result, the Branch has embarked on a journey to develop a diverse and collaborative workforce through the **Culture and Capabilities** pillar of its strategic plan.

Our Culture and Capabilities Initiatives

1

Foster Branch Community

2

Integrate Modern Ways of Working

3

Align on Roles and Improve Training

4

Expand Recruiting Capabilities

5

Improve Engagement and Retention



Culture and Capabilities Initiatives

1 **Foster Branch Community:** *Establish a branch-wide culture of belonging, collaboration, and mentorship*

- 1.1 Develop and document culture norms in collaboration with Immunization Branch leadership to proactively foster a positive community
- 1.2 Utilize existing satisfaction surveys to collect and review employee perspectives and track changes across collection periods to improve branch-wide community

2 **Integrate Modern Ways of Working:** *Adopt collaborative modern ways of working and a supportive working environment across the Immunization Branch*

- 2.1 Continuously evaluate the Branch's working arrangements and collaborate with HR to clarify policy guidelines and guardrails
- 2.2 Periodically define, review, and implement process and tools to enable a flexible work environment with consistent cross-organizational communication, collaboration, and branch-wide information sharing

3 **Align on Roles and Improve Training:** *Formalize Immunization Branch roles, responsibilities, and trainings to create an agile workforce and facilitate knowledge transfer*

- 3.1 Formalize a process to ensure alignment of roles within the organizational structure and to CDC cooperative agreement requirements, including updating and documenting job descriptions, role specific tools, transition plans, and relevant best practices (i.e., key learnings from Immunization or Communicable Disease Branch roles)
- 3.2 Work with HR to design and implement an overall workforce strategy, including alternative staffing models and more flexible employment options to fill open Branch roles, rebalance workload, and reduce employee burnout
- 3.3 Develop and maintain a centralized training library of role-specific resources for Immunization Branch employees

4 **Expand Recruiting Capabilities:** *Build a diverse team with the capabilities, experiences, and cultural awareness to meet the needs of the communities of North Carolina*

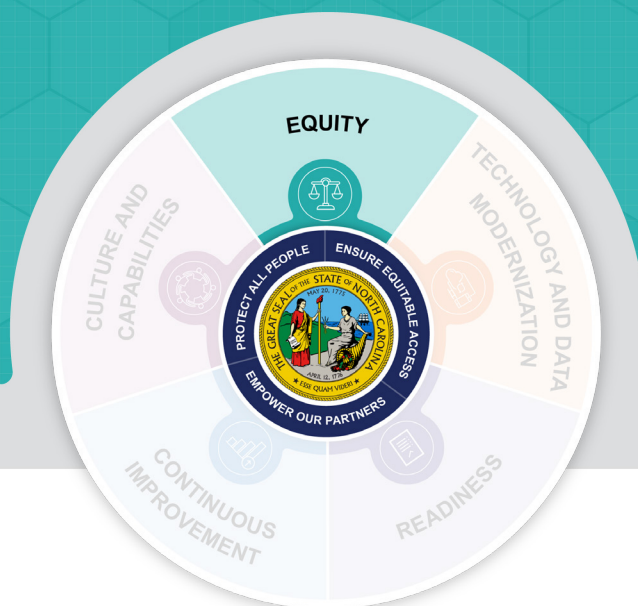
- 4.1 Develop outreach strategies to identify and address staffing vacancies and capability needs when approaching candidates for Immunization Branch roles
- 4.2 Establish a recurring cadence with HR to check-in on hiring process, including branch-specific candidate applications, to fill vacant roles and onboard new hires promptly
- 4.3 Design and implement a structured full-time, internship, and fellowship program with educational institutions and community-based organizations across the state to establish a strong recruiting pipeline for the Immunization Branch
- 4.4 Develop and maintain an Immunization Branch onboarding package and training materials to supplement the HR onboarding process and accelerate effectiveness of new employees and temporary hires

5 **Improve Engagement and Retention:** *Implement a plan to develop, engage, recognize, and retain Immunization Branch employees*

- 5.1 Develop a process for Immunization Branch leadership to have structured employee career development conversations (incl. promotion success, transparent career paths) to identify and address staff capability gaps
- 5.2 Develop a branch-wide employee recognition program to acknowledge and honor workforce who provide exceptional value and/or notable years of service



EQUITY



Proactively monitor equity gaps, define strategies, and expand relationships to improve access to, confidence in, and acceptance of vaccines

The Immunization Branch is committed to understanding and intentionally addressing the longstanding health and vaccination disparities that disproportionately impact communities and various socio-demographic populations across North Carolina. The **Equity** pillar of the Immunization Branch strategic plan will focus on data-driven initiatives to address care gaps and improve vaccine equity.

Our Equity Initiatives

1 Ensure Ongoing Strategic Alignment

2 Increase Internal and External Awareness

3 Leverage External Partners

4 Establish Success Measures



Equity Initiatives

1 **Ensure Ongoing Strategic Alignment:** *Develop an immunization-specific equity strategy as an extension of the greater Department of Public Health equity strategy to increase access to, confidence in, and acceptance of vaccines*

- 1.1 Clearly define immunization-specific objectives and measurable goals to identify, monitor, and address equity gaps and disparities
- 1.2 Create action plan for all identified immunization-specific objectives and measurable goals with clearly defined roles and activities to manage implementation
- 1.3 Conduct quarterly collaboration sessions with internal groups and other divisions and sections within DPH (i.e., DCFW) to exchange vaccine-related information regarding equity strategic initiatives and measurable progress toward equity goals, equity data strategy, and updates on evolving equity priorities
- 1.4 Review and leverage the framework, tools, and policies set by the Health Equity Portfolio (HEP) to guide vaccine-related decision-making through application of the larger HEP strategy

2 **Increase Internal & External Awareness:** *Develop and conduct internal and external education programs for staff and key parties on the drivers and impact of vaccination inequity*

- 2.1 Improve trainings and resources to enhance partner, provider, and relevant parties' unique perspectives and understanding of vaccine inequities and disease incidences
- 2.2 Facilitate and share internal trainings, resources, and webinars for staff to highlight the importance of equity, align on general equity strategies and impacts, and highlight Immunization Branch-specific equity priorities

3 **Leverage External Partners:** *Engage with equity partners across North Carolina to improve messaging around and access to vaccines*

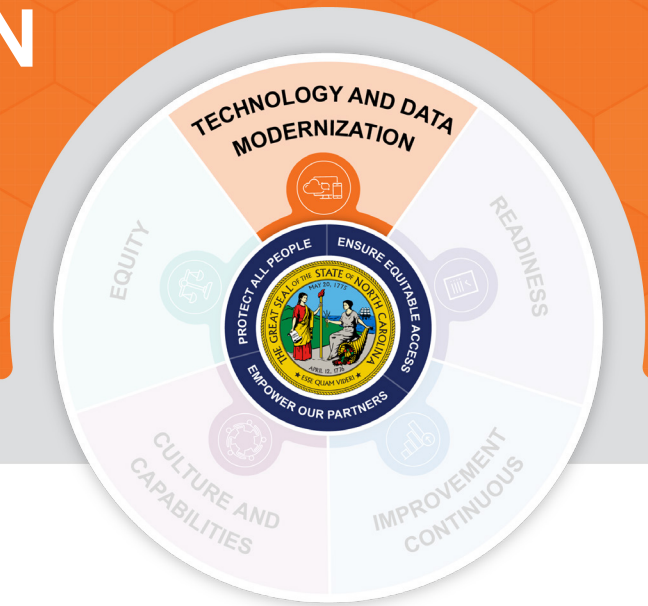
- 3.1 Support and socialize public facing vaccination access map by vaccine type to highlight community coverage across care providers (i.e., local health departments and provider communications at the county level)
- 3.2 Work with internal partners to develop and distribute accessible, high-level vaccine equity takeaways and resources for the community (i.e., dashboards/ reports, infographics, language equity hub)
- 3.3 Establish and maintain an Immunization Branch-led network of new and existing external equity parties (i.e., community-based organizations, professional equity associations, academia, community leaders, and payers) in conjunction with the broader HEP Community Engagement Plan

4 **Establish Success Measures:** *Define key equity indicators and a process of equity insight sharing to improve vaccine coverage and reduce disparities*

- 4.1 Establish, collect, and share key equity indicators for each of the immunization-specific goals and objectives and relay to all relevant personnel
- 4.2 Develop and assess an Immunization Branch data inventory to understand available data and gaps (e.g., childhood inequities) that need to be addressed to effectively report and measure on key equity indicators
- 4.3 Develop reports/dashboards/infographics/analytical tools that provide actionable operational insights and allow for continuous monitoring of vaccine equity progress against key indicators
- 4.4 Define a standard process of sharing and collecting vaccine equity data amongst internal and external equity partners to increase visibility to align with the greater equity data strategy



TECHNOLOGY AND DATA MODERNIZATION



Establish vaccine systems and an interoperable data environment to streamline operations, improve surveillance, and enhance analytics

The Immunization Branch has identified **Technology and Data Modernization** as a pillar of its strategic plan to integrate technology platforms and accelerate data insights. Our Technology and Data Modernization effort will be anchored by a new Immunization Information System (IIS) designed to exchange, integrate, share, and retrieve electronic health information. Additionally, the Branch will leverage automation to save time and reduce reliance on manual day-to-day processes.

Our Technology and Data Modernization Initiatives

- 1 Implement New Immunization Information System (IIS)
- 2 Improve End-User Experience
- 3 Increase Automation Capabilities

- 4 Enhance Data Visualization Capabilities
- 5 Ensure Technology and Data Alignment



Technology and Data Modernization Initiatives

1 **Implement New Immunization Information System (IIS):** *Support design requirements and implementation of an integrated, interoperable IIS*

- 1.1 Establish a user-focused approach for vaccine systems including a feedback loop with providers to track IIS needs and ensure requests are documented and assessed for fit within the Immunization Branch business strategy
- 1.2 Collaborate with Information Technology Division (ITD) to ensure new and future IIS system updates and requirements can be managed efficiently and effectively
- 1.3 Implement and maintain IIS with baseline capabilities to meet CDC and state requirements (i.e., seamless data exchange, provider reporting, and integration with surveillance systems)
- 1.4 Develop and continuously update Immunization Branch training materials for new and future IIS operations
- 1.5 Provide easy to use tools and dedicated resources for branch-wide onboarding and helpdesk teams

2 **Improve End-User Experience:** *Continuously improve end-user experience on Immunization Branch platforms by utilizing modern, scalable, and integrated technology*

- 2.1 Develop an approach to consolidate, re-design, and update Immunization Branch website to improve internal and external user experience
- 2.2 Collaborate with the Information Technology Division to continually improve Immunization Branch technology platforms, tools, and applications to improve resident experience

3 **Increase Automation Capabilities:** *Leverage automation to streamline Branch business operations on key processes*

- 3.1 Regularly assess current Immunization Branch operations and identify opportunities for automation
- 3.2 Periodically review business cases with the Information Technology Division to review, approve, and implement automation within Immunization Branch

4 **Enhance Data Visualization Capabilities:** *Improve immunization dashboards to enhance data visualization and drive informed decision-making*

- 4.1 Collaborate with internal partners to assess current and new immunization dashboard needs to accurately portray immunization metrics
- 4.2 Collaborate with Data Office to ensure Immunization Branch dashboards are compliant with data sharing regulations

5 **Ensure Technology and Data Alignment:** *Align Immunization Branch technology strategy with larger Epidemiology/DPH technology and data strategy, innovation, and investments*

- 5.1 Establish Immunization Branch strategy to ensure technology and data investments closely align with broader DHHS strategy
- 5.2 Collaborate across the Epidemiology Section and with the Data Office to define an integration strategy with other systems to promote immunization-specific data interoperability, sharing, and compatibility on key projects



OUR PATH FORWARD



As the Immunization Branch, we recognize and embrace our critical role to promote public health and ensure equitable access to vaccines. This 2023 – 2030 Strategic Plan reflects our commitment to achieving this purpose. Over the next several years, we plan to build workforce capabilities and capacity, redesign functional processes, and implement a technology infrastructure necessary to execute this plan.

We are optimistic for the future based on the strategic focus areas and priority initiatives included in this strategic plan. We are passionate about the opportunity to deliver on our purpose of protecting the health, safety, and well-being of all people in North Carolina by ensuring equitable access to vaccines and empowering our partners with trusted, reliable information and support services in the ongoing fight against vaccine preventable disease.

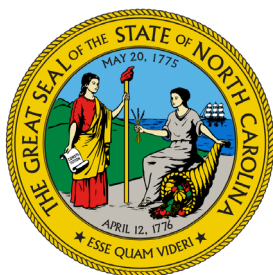
Plans leveraged in the development of our Immunization Branch strategic plan

[NC DHHS 2021-2023 Strategic Plan](#)

[NC State Health Improvement Plan](#)

[Healthy North Carolina 2030](#)





NORTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

NC DPH, WCH: Immunization Branch (ncdhhs.gov)