



Association of
North Carolina Boards of Health

June 23, 2023

North Carolinian Tapped for Leadership Position at CDC



Dr. Mandy Cohen, former Secretary of NC Department of Health and Human Services, has been chosen as the new head of the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention according to a June 16, 2023 press release and news stories from the White House and President Joseph Biden. Dr. Cohen will replace the current director, Dr. Rochelle Walensky, who reportedly will be stepping down at the end of June.

The **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)** is the national public health agency of the United States. It is a United States federal agency under the Department of Health and Human Services, and is headquartered in Atlanta, Georgia.

The agency's main goal is the protection of public health and safety through the control and prevention of disease, injury, and disability in the US and worldwide. The CDC especially focuses its attention on infectious disease, food borne pathogens, environmental health, occupational safety and health, health promotion, injury prevention, and educational activities designed to improve the health of United States citizens. The CDC also conducts research and provides information on non-infectious diseases, such as obesity and diabetes.

Dr. Cohen is a respected public health leader who helped our state to navigate through the COVID-19 pandemic, and for directing the Medicaid transformation process. Dr. Cohen's bio states that she has dedicated her career to improving health outcomes for all Americans.

It is thought that Cohen's unique experiences and accomplishments in North Carolina (along with her other career contributions) make her well-suited to lead the CDC as it navigates through a vast variety of public health issues on a daily basis.

According to the White House, Cohen graduated from Cornell University and received her medical degree from Yale School of Medicine and a Master's in Public Health from the Harvard School of Public Health. National publications also state that she is married to Sam Cohen, a health care regulatory attorney, and they have two daughters.

Dr. Cohen is 44 years old. She's an internal medicine doctor, and she has worked in top positions in state and federal government. She may be best known for serving as North Carolina's Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services. She held this position from 2017 to 2021 and was the face of our pandemic response; she reflected on that experience as a commencement speaker in May 2023 at Guilford College.

Dr. Cohen also worked in the Obama administration. She was chief operating officer at the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, where she helped roll out the Affordable Care Act.

One of the challenges that Dr. Cohen may face in her new role is the need to possibly rebuild the confidence and trust that was tested during the Covid-19 pandemic. Many cite that the CDC made some dramatic public missteps in guidance, so Cohen will be tasked with rebuilding the trust publicly and also rebuilding the agency from the inside.

Another responsibility with which Cohen will be tasked is advocating for the CDC in Washington. She will surely be pushing for more funding, more authority for the CDC, and more staffing to carry out the wide variety of worldwide responsibilities that fall on the shoulders of the US CDC.

The CDC partners closely with the American Public Health Association, the American Medical Society, and many other health related institutions in the US and abroad. Our nation continues to experience an obesity epidemic, opioid epidemic, a firearm epidemic, rising numbers of STIs, and many other issues related to public health. Continuing partnerships with the above-named groups and many others will certainly be one of the keys to the success of Dr. Cohen’s tenure at CDC.

Our experience has identified a few key traits that will benefit Dr. Cohen in her role. She has experience navigating the political process on the state and federal levels. For instance, in our state, she worked for a Democratic governor with a Republican legislature to try and expand access to health care. Many public health leaders were able to experience her skills in managing people and implementing policy. She has also shown her commitment to constant communications and putting things in language that the general public can understand.

We sincerely hope that this appointment will benefit our world, our nation, and our state. As the opportunity presents itself, ANCBH will be available to Dr. Cohen and the CDC for consultation, advice, and partnerships aimed at improving the health of our population!

XX



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There is still time to register and attend the upcoming annual meeting which will be held in Seattle / Tacoma Washington on July 31-August 2, 2023. **By attending the 2023 Annual Conference, attendees will be able to:**

- Explore skills for advocacy and leadership roles for public health funding, workforce and equity.
- Demonstrate successful use of the Six Functions of Public Health Governance to improve health outcomes in communities.
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