

Meeting Minutes:

Cultural and Ethnic Communities Leadership Council

Date: March 20, 2026

Minutes prepared by: DHS Community Relations Staff

Location: Webex and NorthPoint Health and Wellness Center (Hybrid)

Attendance

- **CECLC Members:** Alex Abraha, Julie Churcher, Angela Fields, Phil Gaye-Bai, Tonia Lofton, Dr. Joanna Rosa, Shawn Sorrell, Nelly Torori, Paul Slack, Chris Guy, Kiora Matthews
- **State Agency Staff:** Elaina Boytor, Adrien Carretero, Nate Carter, James Clark, Ashley Estrella, Commissioner Shireen Gandhi, Helen Ghebre, Leigh Grauman, Martiga Lohn, Lola Muhammad, Jim Nord, Olivia Olson, Surabhi Singh, Sonya Smith, Shavana Talbert, Yung Jens Vang, Steven Wilson, Haile Tegegne, Crate Darden
- **Public Attendees:** Aliza Bach, Demarcus Ford, Col McRae, Tonneka, Pa Vang

Agenda:

- | | |
|--------------|---|
| 12:00 | Lunch & Community Networking / WebEx Opens |
| 1:00 | Open Public Meeting and Land Acknowledgement |
| 1:05 | Introductions, Welcome & Check-in Activity [Breakout Sessions] <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Introduce new community members and guests• How have you lived one of the Guiding Principles this week? |
| 1:20 | Review and Approve Meeting Agenda and Minutes |
| 1:25 | Community Celebrations & Shout Outs |
| 1:30 | DHS Inspector General, James Clark |
| 2:10 | Program Integrity (Post-Payment Client Outreach project) |
| 2:30 | Break |
| 2:40 | DHS Commissioner, Shireen Gandhi |
| 2:55 | Workgroup Updates & Priorities <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Topics & Issues Workgroup<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ CLAS (Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services) National Standards Update (as it relates to Desired Outcome #3)○ Photo Project (DHS Communications Team)• Legislative Workgroup<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Leadership Role Changes○ Subcommittee○ Update: Bill Tracker |

- Legislative Meet & Greet Planning Team
- Collaborating w/ Topics & Issues (Desired Outcome #3)
- **Equitable Outcomes Workgroup**
 - Working on Desired Outcomes #1 & #2
 - Connecting with Equity Directors for #2

4:00

Adjourn Full Council Meeting

Welcome, Land Acknowledgement, and Introductions

Alex Abraha called the meeting to order and read a land acknowledgement. Abraha reminded CECLC members that complimentary registration for upcoming Tribal State Relations Training sessions is available to them.

Abraha led meeting participants in introductions and initiated breakout sessions. Participants shared discussion points from their breakout sessions.

Decisions Made

Review and approve February minutes and March meeting agenda:

- Motion to approve meeting agenda and February minutes: Angela Fields
- Second: Chris Guy
- The motion passed

Community Celebrations and Shoutouts

Alex Abraha opened the floor for members to share.

- Angela Fields introduced Aliza Bach from Aldea Health, a community-based perinatal support program that supports Medicaid-eligible birthing people and is looking to partner with community leaders and organizations to connect individuals with resources, including doula services and clinical navigations.
 - Aldea Health is interested in identifying people who often provide uncompensated support for birthing people to try to connect them with a pilot program to receive compensation for the work they already do in their communities.
 - The goal is ultimately to be able to identify problems early in pregnancies through regular check-ins so they can be addressed sooner in order to improve outcomes.
- Fields introduced another community partner, Demarcus Ford, host of the Minnesota Cold Talk podcast, which has hosted discussions on issues including community health care access.
- Fields discussed the Let's Work Together initiative, which connects health care workers who work with Somali and Oromo communities.
 - This group is connected with a University of Minnesota cancer prevention training program for the Somali and Oromo communities, and is looking for feedback from frontline health care workers who would like to discuss their experiences and ideas.

- The goal is to communicate in culturally relevant ways with the Oromo and Somali communities; interview participants will receive a \$75 gift card.
- Fields discussed Project Shine, a sleep health six week pilot program for equity focused on culturally informing a sleep extension intervention for African American adults: <https://studyfinder.umn.edu/studies/32058>.
- Twin Cities Metro Adventist Youth and Young Adult hosted a free community health fair on March 22 from 11am-4pm at 6625 Humboldt Ave. N., Brooklyn Center.
- Hennepin County Libraries is organizing community outreach sessions every Thursday in April at the Walker Library to provide resources and services to the library's unhoused patrons; community organizations are invited to join these sessions without preregistration.
- On March 26, Avenues for Youth hosted its annual Building on Dreams fundraising event to support youth experiencing homelessness.
- Helen Ghebre was thanked for her ongoing community outreach efforts.

DHS Inspector General, James Clark

James Clark provided updates on DHS program integrity efforts.

- Efforts to stop fraud in DHS programs will help ensure that these programs continue to exist and Minnesotans can receive the services and support they need.
- The federal government is seeking to significantly reduce funding in the future for programs including Medicaid and initiated a deferral to withhold funds that are due for Medicaid in Minnesota.
 - These actions would negatively impact 1.2 million Minnesotans.
- Clark shared a flyer which was recently created at the request of urban Indian leaders, and which describes warning signs of Medicaid fraud.
 - This flyer is intended for service recipients to understand when a provider may be engaged in fraud.
 - The flyer will soon be posted on the DHS website and outlines some of the incentives that fraudulent providers offer to gain individuals' personal information and submit false claims of services provided.
 - DHS has received tips around identity theft and people never receiving services that were reported on their behalf; it is important for people in the community to continue letting DHS know what is occurring.
 - The flyer will ultimately be provided in multiple languages for the understanding of people from different communities who are being victimized by fraudulent providers.
 - The flyer will be shared with community centers and will be publicized on social media.
- There is a red button on the top of the DHS website with information about reporting suspicions of fraud anonymously: <https://mn.gov/dhs/general-public/office-of-inspector-general/report-fraud/index.jsp>
 - All reports are vetted and no action is taken against providers until investigations are completed.
 - A meeting participant noted that even investigations with no negative findings may significantly impact small providers due to resource constraints.

- A meeting participant said it is important to continue to move forward with equitable measures and cultural responsiveness in order to minimize harm to service recipients and community providers; public health professionals can help with this and can communicate fraud risks to service recipients.
- A meeting participant flagged that community members may lose trust and stop reporting fraud if they perceive that they are losing services as a result of fraud reporting.
- DHS created a webpage to help separate fact from fiction regarding fraud in MN:
<https://mn.gov/dhs/program-integrity/factcheck/>

Program Integrity (Post Payment Client Outreach project)

Elaina Boytor and Ashley Estrella discussed two DHS member outreach program integrity initiatives.

- Both initiatives have the goal of supporting members to understand their services and take action if something doesn't look right, and both include materials for people who use DHS services.
- The Community Outreach Call Center project will involve phone calls to enrollees in certain identified "high-risk" service programs to confirm they actually received billed services.
- The awareness campaign will consist of letters sent to service users explaining how to review service information on EOBs and report suspected fraud to DHS.
 - The DHS Communications team is reviewing other potential methods of communication including text messages and updates to online member notice pages.
- DHS is requesting CECLC guidance on these outreach approaches and materials in order to shape outreach principals, identify red flags or messages to avoid, and name any conditions that should be in place before efforts are implemented more broadly.
- CECLC members are invited to reach out to any of the presenters with feedback after the meeting.
- The goal of the Community Outreach Call Center project is to identify patterns and trends for DHS to investigate, and it is scheduled to begin in the next month.
 - No decisions will be made based on single calls; DHS OIG will investigate or follow up as needed.
- The awareness campaign is designed to:
 - Increase members' ability to identify and report potential payment fraud and verify they received the services they are eligible for.
 - Members will be informed where to report fraud and who to contact for information.
 - Increase case managers' ability to identify and report potential payment fraud and support people they work with if they have questions or fraud concerns.
 - Information will be shared with case managers before it is shared with members.
 - Minimize the number of people using fraud reporting channels to report things that are not fraud (e.g. long waitlists for providers).
- DHS has identified several channels for informing community leaders of the awareness campaign, including creation and distribution of flyers and an informational email to send to community members.
- CECLC members were invited to provide feedback regarding the draft flyer and informational email.
 - A meeting participant stated the importance of tailoring messaging to different audiences to ensure accurate understanding of the information.

- Due to the impact of recent fraud prevention actions, a meeting participant said it is important for DHS to mend relationships with communities before reaching out to encourage them to report fraud.
- A meeting participant suggested including a clear definition of fraud in the communications.
- A meeting participant noted that due to recent immigration enforcement actions, many community members may be reluctant to provide information to someone who says they're calling on behalf of the government.

DHS Commissioner, Shireen Gandhi

- CMS recently informed DHS that they have approved DHS's proposed corrective action plan for program integrity, while noting that DHS is still out of compliance until the tasks in the plan are completed.
 - The biggest upcoming milestone for DHS with CMS is the Minnesota Revalidate program, which requires revalidation of providers and is scheduled to be completed by May 31, 2026.
 - This work is required to be completed on a significantly more condensed timeline than normal provider revalidations.
 - Revalidation will help ensure that all funding that is available for services is getting to legitimate providers and not being wasted by fraudulent actors; there is a significant role for communities to play in this process.
 - DHS is engaged in ongoing conversations around continuity of care to minimize the risk of service recipients losing care if providers are not revalidated to lack of responsiveness or other issues.
 - DHS is conducting outreach with provider associations and holding weekly roundtable discussions with providers to share information and answer questions about the revalidation process.
 - A meeting participant suggested it would be helpful to track demographic data for providers who have and have not been revalidated in order to assess equity and the potential disparate impacts of this process.
 - A meeting participant stated that external pressures around program integrity could result in overcorrection which may impact smaller community providers more severely, resulting in loss of services to communities and damage to providers' trust with DHS.
 - The meeting participant added that DHS should see community providers as partners in these efforts, not adversaries, thereby minimizing negative outcomes and inequities for vulnerable community members.
 - This does not apply to the \$259,000,000 that CMS said they will withhold from DHS provider payments pending the receipt of documentation to provide that they payments were correct.
 - If providers are unable to provide documentation, payments may need to be returned.
 - DHS is working to enhance and improve communications with providers.
 - CMS could take similar withholding actions on a quarterly basis.
- It is important for DHS to engage in increased engagement and outreach with communities, providers, and counties and Tribal Nations who administer programs while continuing to take actions to address program integrity and protect programs.

- Smaller entities or providers who are looking for grants or other funding often ask what DHS can do to provide assistance or guidance to help them through that process.
 - DHS often does not have funding to support staffing for these types of services because the operating budget is small for an agency of this size.
 - The legislature would need to act to increase operating funds in order for DHS to provide these support services.

Workgroup Updates

- Workgroup members are encouraged to check in on the status of their workgroup's 30-, 60-, and 90-day priorities.

Equitable Outcomes Workgroup

- Nina Vongpheth has assumed a leadership role with the equitable outcomes workgroup.

Topics and Issues Workgroup

- No updates were shared.

Legislative and Policy Workgroup

- The legislative and policy workgroup is planning the April 9, 2026 CECLC Legislative Meet & Greet at the Capitol, which will give Council members opportunities to meet directly with legislators to discuss priorities and build relationships.
- CECLC members are encouraged to contact Alex Abraha or Angela Fields if they would like to join this workgroup.
- This workgroup is looking for a co-lead to replace Angela Fields, who is transitioning out of this role.

Meeting adjourned at 4:01 PM