Numbered Memo 2020-24

TO: County Boards of Elections
FROM: Karen Brinson Bell, Executive Director
RE: Multipartisan Assistance Team FAQ and DHHS Guidance
DATE: September 22, 2020

Answers to FAQs for Multipartisan Assistance Teams (MAT)

1. Are counties required to have a MAT?

Yes, counties are required to have a MAT. The law requires each county board of elections to assemble and provide training to a MAT to respond to requests for voter assistance for any primary, general election, referendum, or special election. The team must be made available in each county to assist patients and residents in every covered facility in that county.1 County boards may use CARES funds to recruit and promote the use of Multipartisan assistance teams.

2. Our county is experiencing a shortage of MAT members. Are we required to follow the same steps/processes to appoint these individuals as we do at the start of the appointment term as with Chief Judges and Judges, or can they just be selected?

G.S. § 163-226.3(c), as amended by Section 2.5(a) of Session Law 2020-17, requires that MATs have at least one Republican and one Democratic member, as recommended by the members of that political party serving on the county board of elections. This change applies to MAT members appointed on or after June 12, 2020.

If the team consists of more than two members, voters who are unaffiliated or affiliated with other political parties recognized by the State may be team members. If a county board of elections finds an insufficient number of voters available to meet this requirement, the county board of elections, upon a unanimous vote of all of its sworn members, may appoint an unaffiliated team member to serve instead of a team member representing one of the two political parties having the highest number of affiliated voters in the State. A MAT member’s certification is

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1 08 NCAC 16 .0101.
good for two years from the date the member is certified. However, a MAT member does not have to serve an entire two-year term and may resign at any time. Appointments are made on a rolling basis as needed.

3. **We have a number of temporary employees working in our office at this time. If we do not have any appointed MAT members available to conduct a MAT visit for a facility, are we permitted to send members of our staff and/or a temporary employee to conduct this visit? Would these temporary employees have to go through the same appointment process as our other MAT members, or can they serve as a representative of our office?**

Employees of the office, including temporary employees, are not prohibited from providing assistance to voters in facilities. Employees who will be assisting voters in facilities must be certified and trained as MAT members and must adhere to the political affiliation requirements for MAT members.

4. **Can the county board of elections appoint MAT members who do not reside in the county?**

Statute requires that MAT members be registered voters of the county, so it is not permissible for someone to serve as a MAT member in a county where they are not registered to vote. However, the MAT must assist patients or residents physically located in the MAT’s county, regardless of the voter’s county of registration.

5. **Our MAT members are also one-stop workers, so we planned to have MATs operate until the start of one-stop early voting on October 15. Is this permissible?**

No. Counties are required to provide assistance to residents in facilities upon request. It is not permissible to cease MAT operations at the start of one-stop early voting. If your county is having trouble recruiting MAT members as a result of the COVID-19 epidemic, it is permissible to use CARES Act funding to employ MATs as part of the county board of elections staff.

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2 See G.S. 163-226.3(a)(4), which does not apply to members, employees, or volunteers of the county board of elections, if those members, employees, or volunteers are working as part of a multipartisan team trained and authorized by the county board of elections to assist voters with absentee ballots.

3 See Section 2.5.(a) of Session Law 2020-17.

4 08 NCAC 16 .0104(g).
6. The new law provides that MATs can assist any voter in requesting or voting an absentee ballot, not just patients and residents in facilities. What are the requirements for doing so?

Because MATs are required to assist residents and patients in covered facilities, visits to those facilities should take priority. If your county has the time and resources to deploy MATs to other congregate living facilities or to individual voters, those voters must first request a visit. Both the voter and MAT must adhere to the CDC’s guidelines for preventing the spread of COVID-19.

7. If the policy at a facility is that no visitors are allowed, can MATs still enter? Is there any ability to require facilities to allows MATs?

Neither the State Board nor county boards of elections have the legal authority to require MATs be allowed to enter a facility that restricts visitors. If your office receives a request for a MAT visit from a facility that restricts visitors at this time, our recommendation is to share with the facility the MAT guidance and ask if the facility would be open to an exception for MAT visits with proper precautions as outlined in the guidance, including outdoor, socially distanced visits (when appropriate).

Some counties have also instituted creative solutions such as separating MAT members and voters with a plexiglass shield so that the voter can still hear and see the MAT member but there is an added layer of protection.

8. Will the State Board of Elections be providing PPE specifically for MAT visits, and when can we expect this PPE to arrive?

County boards may use their PPE supplied by Emergency Management for MAT visits. Please contact Amy Strange if your supply is not sufficient.

9. If a facility requires a recent COVID test, what should a county board do?

Provide a copy of the DHHS guidance. You can explain the procedures MAT members will take, in accordance with the MAT Visit Guidance, and request an exception can be made for MAT visits with proper precautions as outlined in the guidance, including outdoor, socially distanced visits (when appropriate). County boards cannot require MAT members to take a COVID test. The published MAT guidance sets out DHHS recommendations for screening MAT members prior to entry into a facility.
10. **What if there is a request for MATs at a facility that has an active outbreak? Is a MAT required to assist a voter diagnosed with COVID?** Similarly, if there are known cases within a facility but COVID residents are isolated, is a MAT required to enter the facility to assist the non-COVID voters?

Administrative rule requires every county board of elections to assemble and provide training to a MAT to respond to requests for assistance from voters in covered facilities. MAT visits should be completed in compliance with published MAT guidance and COVID-19 positive residents should be appropriately isolated by the facility. However, a county board of elections cannot require a MAT member to enter a facility if the member does not feel safe doing so.

11. **Will the PPE listed in the guidance from DHHS protect MAT members from contracting COVID?** We do not have the medical N95 masks and will not have completed a “fit test” as recommended for those type masks.

As outlined in the MAT Visit Guidance, the below order of operations for MAT visits is recommended and is considered sufficient protection, with strong recommendations to limit close contact (within six feet for at least 15 minutes) as much as possible. A surgical mask is strongly encouraged for indoor visits:

- An outdoor setting, with six-foot social distancing maintained and with MAT members and resident or patient wearing a face mask or cloth face covering.
- An outdoor setting, without six-foot social distancing and with MAT members and resident or patient wearing a face mask or cloth face covering. This method might be needed for a resident or patient who requires close contact (for instance, for marking a ballot).
- An indoor setting, with six-foot social distancing maintained and with MAT members wearing PPE consistent with the facility’s care requirements, including: a surgical mask, face shield, and nitrile gloves. Resident or patient wears a face mask or cloth face covering.
- An indoor setting, without six-foot social distancing and with MAT members wearing PPE consistent with the facility’s care requirements, including: a surgical mask, face shield, and nitrile gloves. Resident or patient wears a face mask or cloth face covering. This method might be needed for a resident or patient who requires close contact (for instance, for marking a ballot).

The facility must properly isolate known COVID-positive patients so if you receive a request for assistance from a patient who is COVID-positive, a MAT would not be able to assist that voter until the person has been released from isolation.

12. **If a COVID case is identified at the facility after a MAT visit, will the county board of elections be notified?**

If a case is diagnosed in a facility after a visit by the MAT, the local health department will determine if MAT members need to be contacted to verify whether they were exposed at a time
that might lead to consider recommending quarantine. This is one reason why it is important for the MAT to check in when arriving at the facility.

13. If MAT members come back into the office and assist with administrative processes, does that create possible exposure to those in the office?

This exposure risk is consistent with MAT members and other staff being potentially exposed in non-facility (community) settings. In the office setting and in community settings, exposure risk is reduced if MAT members and other staff are practicing the 3Ws:

- Wear a cloth mask over your nose and mouth.
- Wait 6 feet apart. Avoid close contact.
- Wash your hands or use hand sanitizer.

Your county board of elections office should employ continuity of operations measures consistent with Numbered Memo 2020-17 to reduce the necessity to close if a known COVID exposure were identified.

14. For facilities that confirm they don’t have known COVID cases when scheduled, can we reconfirm on the day of scheduled visitation and cancel if there are active COVID cases?

It is highly recommended that MAT members confirm their scheduled appointment with the facility on the day of or the day before the scheduled visit.
Guidance on Multipartisan Assistance Teams (MAT) visitation procedure for hospitals, clinics, nursing homes, assisted living or congregate settings

August 1, 2020

A Multipartisan Assistance Team, or MAT, is a team comprised of individuals of different political party affiliation deployed by a county board of elections to assist residents and patients in hospitals, clinics, nursing homes, and adult care homes (“facilities”) with absentee voting. MATs can help voters in facilities who have disabilities or who otherwise require assistance in registering to vote and requesting or casting a mail-in absentee ballot, but who do not have a family member or guardian available to help. The team provides a public service to these voters by giving them lawfully authorized, neutral assistance with the absentee voting process. It is a felony for owners or employees of these facilities to assist in the absentee voting process.

Preventing transmission of respiratory pathogens (including COVID-19) in hospitals, clinics, congregate, and residential care settings requires adherence to, and application of, ongoing strong infection prevention practices and policies including environmental and engineering controls, administrative controls, safer work practices, and personal protective equipment (PPE).

We appreciate the efforts of families, residents, patients, staff, and providers across the state in responding to the COVID-19 crisis. Ensuring the health and safety of facility residents and patients has been challenging and required tremendous work on the part of facility management and frontline staff. The upcoming November 3, 2020 election raises the concern of access to voting for those in settings that do not allow for them to vote in person during the early voting period or on Election Day or may need support in the act of voting due to various factors.

We also recognize that hospitals, clinics, and residential care facilities are at risk of experiencing outbreaks of COVID-19, and the residents and patients of these facilities are often in a high-risk category for serious complications from COVID-19. **Outdoor visitation, when available, for MAT visits is strongly encouraged at this time. If outdoor visitation is not possible (based on resident or patient condition, facility configuration, or weather conditions), indoor visitation guidelines are outlined below.**

This guidance applies to MAT visits to any facility that provides residential or in-patient healthcare that is licensed or operated pursuant to Chapter 122C, Chapter 131D, or Chapter 131E of the General Statutes, including, for example, a hospital, clinic, nursing home, or adult care home; or by the federal government or an Indian tribe, where persons are seeking MAT assistance for voting.

**General Guidelines for MAT Visits**

- MAT visitation should be conducted in accordance with the visitation policy for each facility.
• It is preferable that a MAT visit occur in the following manner, with item 1 being the most preferred setting, followed by alternatives in order of preference and based on resident or patient needs and medical condition:

1) An outdoor setting, with six-foot social distancing maintained and with MAT members and resident or patient wearing a face mask or cloth face covering.

2) An outdoor setting, without six-foot social distancing and with MAT members and resident or patient wearing a face mask or cloth face covering. This method might be needed for a resident or patient who requires close contact (for instance, for marking a ballot).

3) An indoor setting, with six-foot social distancing maintained and with MAT members wearing PPE consistent with the facility's care requirements, including: a surgical mask, face shield, and nitrile gloves. Resident or patient wears a face mask or cloth face covering.

4) An indoor setting, without six-foot social distancing and with MAT members wearing PPE consistent with the facility's care requirements, including: a surgical mask, face shield, and nitrile gloves. Resident or patient wears a face mask or cloth face covering. This method might be needed for a resident or patient who requires close contact (for instance, for marking a ballot).

After the request for a MAT has been made and before the visit starts:

• Prior to arrival, MATs, in coordination with the county board of elections, should call the facility to determine its visitation policy and schedule a date and time for the visit. The MAT should determine the specific needs of each resident or patient to be visited and work with the facility to determine the best setting for visiting each resident or patient, using the guidance noted above.

• Upon arriving at the facility, MAT members should check in with appropriate personnel (ideally the facility contact person who arranged the visit) or the person at the front desk and follow the current COVID-19 procedure per the facility. When it is time to leave, MAT members should follow the facility’s check-out procedures and let facility staff know the team is leaving.

• A facility staff member trained in patient safety and infection control measures should be available to transport residents/patients to and from the MAT visitation session, screen the MAT visitors, and remind the visitors of the visitation protocols and infection prevention measures to be taken during the MAT visit. The facility shall ensure privacy for the resident or patient and their MAT visitors.

Monitoring for Symptoms:

• MAT members must be screened for fever and other symptoms associated with COVID-19 (fever equal to or greater than 100.0 degrees Fahrenheit, cough, shortness of breath, sore throat, muscle aches, chills or new onset of loss of taste or smell) prior to meeting with the resident or patient.

• Any MAT members with symptoms of COVID-19 infection must not be permitted to visit with a resident or patient. MAT members must cooperate with the facility’s screening process at each visit and attest to not having signs or symptoms or current diagnosis of COVID-19; if they have had COVID-19, they must provide documentation (e.g., doctor’s note) that their isolation period has ended.
MAT members must notify the facility immediately if they develop signs and symptoms of COVID-19 or have a diagnosis of COVID-19 within 2 days of visiting a resident or patient.
  o As part of that notification, they must provide the date of the visit and the resident(s) or patient(s) they were in contact with. Facilities should consider and manage the resident(s) or patient(s) who had contact with the MAT members as potentially exposed and follow up with the facility’s medical director or resident/patient care provider for further assessment and management.

Social Distancing and Minimizing Exposure:
  o MAT members should always remain in the immediate presence of fellow team members while maintaining a six-foot distance.
  o MAT visits must be limited to no more than two individuals at a time per resident or patient.
  o MAT visitors must always remain at least six feet from the resident/patient and staff during the visit when possible. If such distancing is not possible (based on the needs of the resident or patient), MAT members should limit the timeframe of visitation to no more than 15-minute intervals.
    o For residents or patients who request help with marking paperwork, the MAT team should complete as much of the paperwork as possible from a greater than six-foot distance from the resident or patient, then complete activities of less than a six-foot distance for as short a duration as possible.
    o When possible, MAT teams should limit close contact with residents or patients to one MAT member. The second MAT member should maintain a six-foot distance.

Face Coverings:
  o MAT members must bring and wear a face mask that extends over both the mouth and nose for the entire visit or wear a facility-provided face mask that extends over both the mouth and nose.
  o **For inside visits**, MAT members must wear PPE consistent with the facility’s care standards for the entire visit.
  o Residents and patients should wear a cloth face covering or face mask (if tolerated) during the MAT visit.
  o For residents or patients with hearing loss, MAT members may wear a face shield in place of a face mask.
    o A face shield should not replace the use of a face mask while traveling through the facility to attend and leave a MAT visit.
    o Face shields should be used only when necessary for residents or patients with hearing loss.
    o If face shields are used without a mask, they should wrap around the sides of the wearer’s face and extend to below the chin.
    o For those with full hearing loss for whom an interpreter is requested, the interpreter must also follow the infection prevention procedures outlined in this guidance. County boards of elections do not provide interpreters.
Cleaning and Hygiene:

- MAT members must sanitize pencils, magnifiers, and any other MAT materials before and after visits, utilizing an EPA-registered disinfectant. The ballot and ballot container envelopes should not be disinfected because of possible deterioration to the paper and ink.
- The facility must provide >60% alcohol-based hand rub to MAT members and demonstrate how to use it appropriately if necessary.
  - MAT members, residents/patients and coordinating staff must use alcohol-based hand rub before and after each visit.
  - MAT members must wear a new pair of nitrile gloves while working with each resident or patient.
  - Hand hygiene practices must be completed before and after gloves are used.

For additional information, please see Centers for Disease Control (CDC) guidance on COVID-19:
  - Steps to Take if You are Sick
  - Ending Home Isolation (If You Have Been Sick with COVID-19)
  - Steps to Take if You are Exposed to COVID-19 (Quarantine)

For additional information on proper use and disposal of PPE:
  - Videos: Hand Hygiene, Hand Washing, PPE Donning and Doffing
  - Video: CDC Demonstration of Doffing (Taking Off) Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

For additional information on proper social distancing:
  - CDC Social Distancing

Staying apart brings us together. Protect your family and neighbors.

Learn more at nc.gov/covid19.