

## Fort Bend County Health & Human Services

### Application for

### Strengthening Disability Inclusion Efforts within Local Health Departments

### National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO)

#### A. Local Jurisdiction Information

- The applicant organization is **Fort Bend County**. The specific subdivision that will carry out the activities of the project with NACCHO is the Health & Human Services department.
- The county has a population of close to 900,000 so fits the 500,000 or more category.
- The county is a mix of urban, suburban and rural. The east side, closest to Houston is urban, with suburban communities including many who work in Houston. The west side of the county is more rural and includes a state park as well as many farming communities. The county has a total land area of 875 square miles.
- The local health department, Fort Bend County Health & Human Services, serves only Fort Bend County.
- The Strengthening Disability Inclusion Efforts within Local Health Departments project will serve only Fort Bend County.
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#### B. Project Narrative

##### Jurisdictional Need:

Fort Bend County (FBC) is located just outside of Houston, Texas. The county has a population of close to 900,000. FBC has multiple city, town and village governmental entities within its borders and approximately 40% of the population lives in the unincorporated areas of the county. FBC has been referred to as the most diverse county in the United States due to the population mix of 30.2% White, 25.5% Hispanic, 21.9% Black or African American, and 21.6% Asian by

race and ethnicity. More than 28% of the county population was born in countries other than the US (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021), and about 40% of Fort Bend County residents stated they spoke a language other than English at home. The county population overall is well educated, with 91% having graduated high school and 48% holding a bachelor’s degree or higher. The median household income is \$102,590, however, slightly more than 7 percent of the population lives in poverty (US Census 2022). In addition to the diverse population, there were 54,790 individuals living with disabilities in the county in 2017, according to the Texas Workforce Investment Council’s ‘People with Disabilities: A Texas Profile’, published in March 2019. At that time the county population was 764,828, meaning that 7 percent of the population was experiencing a disability. The discussion in the profile indicates that this estimate may be low due to lack of inclusion of some individuals with mental health disabilities. The profile data shows the following range of types of disabilities within FBC:

Type of Disability / Difficulty	Number of individuals	Percent of those with disabilities
Ambulatory Difficulty	27,209	51.4%
Cognitive Difficulty	22,823	37.8%
Hearing Difficulty	14,930	28.3%
Independent Living Difficulty	20,593	35.9%
Self-care Difficulty	12,171	19.6%
Vision Difficulty	8,213	18.6%
Total population with disability	54,790	

There are many with more than one identified difficulty which means the total number of difficulties is almost twice the number of individuals that are counted.

These difficulties is an area of concern for the local health department in its efforts to improve the health of all county residents. Much like cultural and language barriers, there must be committed effort to reach the population with disabilities including health literacy communications, access solutions for those with physical limitations, interactions with care givers to ensure equitable provision of services to the individuals for whom they care, and easy to understand materials for those with sight, cognitive and self-care/independent living difficulties.

Implementation Capacity:

Fort Bend County Health & Human Services includes the following divisions and programs that work directly with the population of the county: Animal Services, Clinical Health Services, Long Term Response (pandemic/epidemic response), Chronic Disease, Emergency Medical Service, Environmental Health, Epidemiology, Indigent Health, Social Services, Public Health Emergency Preparedness and Response, Office of Communication, Education & Engagement, and Performance, Policy & Innovation. Each of these programs has a need to understand, communicate with and serve the many sectors of the county population, including those with disabilities. In partnership, the Office of Communication, Education & Engagement and the Health Equity Specialist are involved in assuring training, policy implementation, community

outreach and partnership building to ensure an equitable provision of health department services to all areas of and populations within the county. This team will be very involved in the planning activities with NACCHO and our partner disability serving organization throughout the course of this funding. Lead staff over the project will be the Director of the Office of Communication, Education & Engagement and the Performance & Innovation Specialist, who oversees the activities of the Health Equity Specialist. Building this focus on individuals with disabilities into all policies and programs of the health department will allow for ongoing sustainability in practice and including, in the future, seeking of financial support for any specific initiatives outside of normal health department efforts. This has been the intent of all equity programming – to establish the plan of action, and the policies and programs to support all residents in Fort Bend County.

Willingness and capacity to establish and leverage partnerships:

Health departments in general work with and through community partnerships. In the case of disabilities, from 2006 forward, the health departments within the state of Texas have been charged with responsibility for people with disabilities, who are not in institutions, but live in our community in the area of emergency preparedness. Many individuals with disabilities function well during ordinary times when infrastructure is intact and services are available. However, they are among the most vulnerable when disasters strike. Many have power dependency for life saving or mobility functions, many depend on periodic visits by caregivers or need frequent visits to ancillary health care such as dialysis, physical therapy, day care programs. These services may be disrupted during a disaster. Fort Bend County Health & Human Services created a registry to track the individuals who made need additional assistance during times of natural disaster. The program was initially called Special Needs Assistance Program (SNAP) and later retitled as Enable Fort Bend. The registry contains around 3500 individuals and they are contacted annually to update their situation. During disasters, these individuals, or their caregivers, are contacted to be sure they are aware of the pending emergency and that they are taken care of or need additional assistance. In order to keep this registry updated, the health department reaches out through many service organizations including disability serving organizations such as the Center for Independent Living, the Arc of Fort Bend, NAMI and others. The Center for Independent Living was instrumental in the initial set up of the SNAP program, providing contact information and a better understanding of the community living with disabilities within Fort Bend County. During the performance of the health department with the Medicaid Transformation 1115 Waiver Delivery System Reform Incentive Program (DSRIP), the health department partnered with many community organizations to provide transformational and inclusive programming for the Medicaid eligible and uninsured population of the county. Two of the partners were disability serving organizations, the Arc of Fort Bend and NAMI. The Arc is the local chapter of the Arc of the United States which provides advocacy, support and services for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families. NAMI is the National Alliance on Mental Illness. Both of these local chapters provided much assistance to the health department in understanding the limitations of current systems in addressing the needs of those with disabilities for maintaining and improving health outcomes.