

# 2019 NPCR NEW JERSEY SUCCESS STORY

## New Jersey Cancer Registry: Stephanie M. Hill, MPH, CTR

### *Telecommuting: An Essential Component of Contingency Planning for Registry Operations*

# NATIONAL PROGRAM OF CANCER REGISTRIES SUCCESS STORY

**SUMMARY:** The New Jersey State Cancer Registry (NJSCR) has successfully implemented a telecommuting policy that allows staff to work from home on a limited basis. While offering the option to telecommute is an important staff recruitment and retention tool, as an added benefit to the NJSCR, having a telecommuting policy in place has served to lessen the impact of emergency closures on registry operations.

**CHALLENGE:** When unforeseen circumstances such as severe weather or other emergencies disrupt registry operations, the impact on our ability to meet critical deadlines can be considerable. The NJSCR typically experiences several weather-related closures each year, in addition to staff absenteeism due to inclement weather. Other closures have resulted from state government shutdowns and infrastructure failures. These closures have the potential to not only impact staff productivity but also interfere in collaborative activities with other programs, including the CDC, NCI and NAACCR. In 2014, the NJSCR was unable to meet a major programmatic deadline due in large part to prolonged and numerous closures due to severe weather. NJSCR management identified the need to implement telecommuting procedures in order to mitigate the effects of future closures.

**RCA PROCESS:** The NJSCR is operated jointly by the New Jersey Department of Health (DOH) and Rutgers Cancer Institute of New Jersey (RCINJ). In 2015, the NJSCR worked with RCINJ to develop and implement a telecommuting policy for eligible staff. Eligible NJSCR staff are those who have completed their training and who perform tasks amenable to telework. Staff who are ineligible for telecommuting are those in training, and those whose primary job duties require a presence in the office (i.e., answering phones). Due to New Jersey Department of Health (DOH) policies, NJSCR staff employed by DOH are not permitted to telecommute.

The NJSCR telecommuting policy includes three categories of telework:

- Regular – employees who telecommute on a regular schedule, up to three days per week.
- As Needed – employees who telecommute periodically as circumstances require.
- Emergency – employees who telecommute only during emergency closures.

Employees who wish to telecommute must complete a suitability questionnaire and a telecommuting agreement, which establishes the telecommuting schedule and location, work to be done remotely, methods of communication and means of accountability. Staff are provisioned with registry-owned computers if available, but they must supply their own high-speed internet service. As of 2019, all eligible NJSCR staff were telecommuting regularly at least one day per week.

**RESULTS:** During the winter of 2018-2019, the NJSCR experienced weather-related closures that could have amounted to 260 hours of lost staff time. The ability of staff to telecommute during those closures reduced lost productivity by almost half to 153 hours.

Most recently, a structural failure in the building in which the registry is housed forced the evacuation of over 200 individuals from several programs, including the NJSCR. Because 10 of the 17 NJSCR operations staff were able to telecommute, space for the remaining personnel was quickly identified in another building, and the relocation was accomplished within one week. The ability of some staff to telecommute reduced loss of productivity during the intervening week by 60% from 620 to 245 staff hours, allowing NJSCR to remain on schedule to achieve key deliverables. Productivity of telecommuting staff, as measured by the number of completed workflow tasks in the registry database, was equal to or greater than productivity in the office.

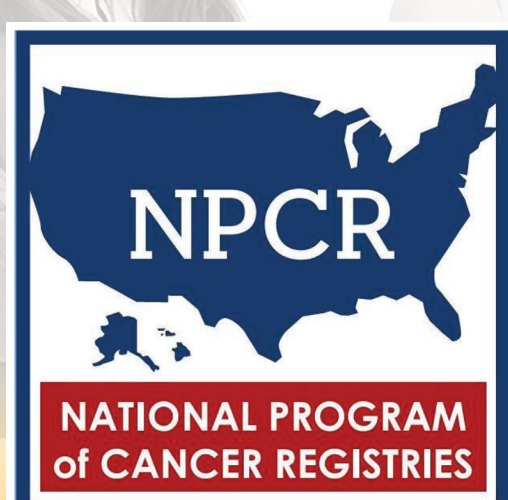
**SUSTAINING SUCCESS:** Considering the proven role of telecommuting in mitigating the impact of closures on registry operations, the NJSCR plans to pursue expanding its telecommuting program to include staff employed by the DOH. Enabling full telecommuting privileges for all staff could reduce lost productivity due to building closures to negligible levels.

**CONTACT INFORMATION:**

New Jersey State Cancer Registry

Tel: 609-633-0500

Email: [stephanie.hill@doh.nj.gov](mailto:stephanie.hill@doh.nj.gov)



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