

CONNECTIONS

April 2014

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Bringing Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services employees closer together

Take Time When Choosing Your Health Insurance and Other Benefits

By Emily Walter
Human Resources and Development

The annual Open Enrollment period is just around the corner, so it is time to start thinking about your insurance needs. This year's Open Enrollment will run from Tuesday, May 13, through Tuesday, May 27, and will include some big changes. The Choice Plan has been eliminated, and a new Consumer Focused Health Plan tied to a Health Savings Account has been added. Detailed information on all of the changes, new premium rates and plan details will be available on the [State Employee Wellness & Benefits homepage](#).

We always encourage employees to choose the right plan for their needs. In my 12 years working with benefits, I have frequently asked employees why they chose the plan they did. The responses I get are often "it was the same plan I had last year," "my coworker took that plan," "it was the cheapest," or, conversely, "it was the most expensive so I figured it must be the best plan." The reality is that only you can determine which plan is best for you and your family. Only you

know what types of medical services you may need, which doctors you want to use, and how much you can afford to spend on your health care needs.

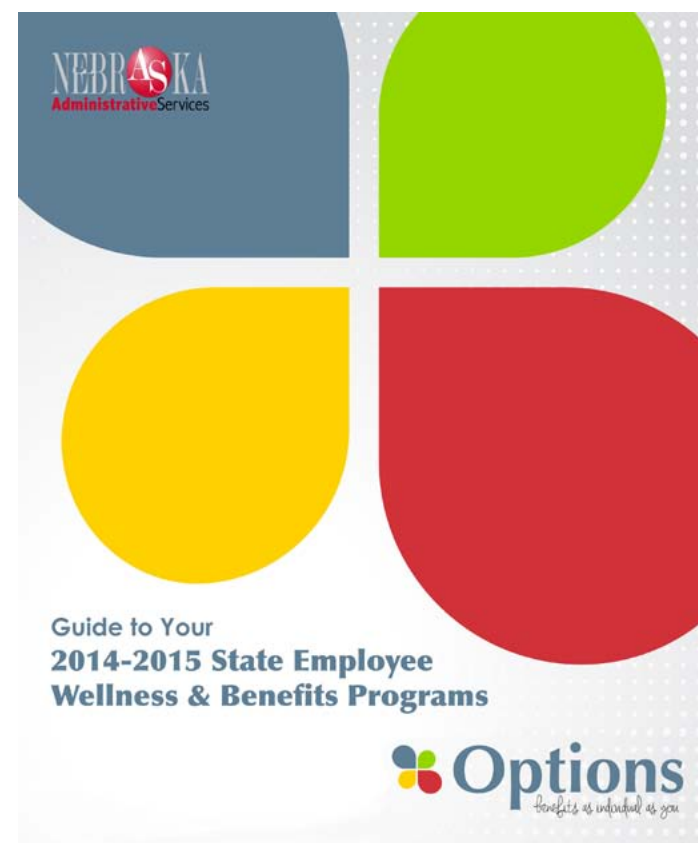
Health care is often one of a family's major household expenses. A survey by DSS Research found that more than 30 percent of employees choosing from employer-based health plans spent less than one hour evaluating their benefit options and another 34 percent spent only one to two hours. Compare that to a Colonial Life poll that found 77 percent of consumers spent several days or more researching a new car purchase, and 70 percent spent several days or more researching a vacation destination. An even more stark comparison is drawn from GE Capital Retail Finance's Annual Major Purchase Shopper Study. That study showed that consumers spent an average of 76 days (yes, DAYS!) researching major purchases such as appliances, electronics, home furnishings, etc.

I know health insurance can be a boring topic, but it is clear that we all need to spend our time choosing wisely. The State Employee Wellness and Benefits

Office does a good job of providing summarized and easy-to-understand information about our insurance plans in the Options guide published each year. My favorite tool is the Health Care Plan Comparison chart that lays out all of the plans side-by-side so I can easily see the deductibles, co-pays and co-insurance amounts for the major services (preventive care, hospital services, physician office visits, etc.).

The Options guide and associated tools are available on the benefits website at <http://das.nebraska.gov/benefits.html>

Please take the time to read the information available and use the provided tools to make an informed decision on your health plan.



Stay Connected on



make the connection . . .

DHHS Public Website: www.dhhs.ne.gov
DHHS Employee Website: <http://dhhsemployees/>
DHHS Helpline: 1-800-254-4202, (402) 471-6035 in Lincoln, or via e-mail at dhhs.helpline@nebraska.gov

Chief Executive Officer: Kerry Winterer	Medicaid and Long-Term Care Division Director: position is currently vacant
Behavioral Health Division Director: Scot Adams, Ph.D.	Public Health Division Director/Chief Medical Officer: Dr. Joseph Acierno
Children and Family Services Division Director: Thomas Pristow	Veterans' Homes Division Director: John Hilgert
Developmental Disabilities Division Director: Jodi Fenner	Chief Operating Officer: Matt Clough

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[DHHS' Employee Website....](#)

New information and photos are added daily to the employee website. Here are some recent posts and the dates they appeared. Like what you're seeing and reading? Then check out the employee homepage every day! Got an idea or a photo you'd like to share for the employee homepage or *Connections*? Send it to Dianna.seiffert@nebraska.gov.

Homepage Homeruns

[LRC Employees Wear Blue for Colon Cancer Awareness, March 12](#)



National Dress in Blue Day is celebrated on the first Friday of March bringing attention to colon cancer. Individuals, businesses and community groups across the country wore blue and encouraged others

to do the same. Dress in Blue Day is part of National Colon Cancer Awareness Month. A group of Lincoln Regional Center employees supported Colon Cancer Awareness by wearing blue.

Colon cancer starts with a polyp that is not cancer yet. Testing can help your doctor tell if there is a problem, and some tests can find a growth before it becomes cancer.

If colon cancer is found early, you have a good chance of beating it with treatment.

The Nebraska Colon Cancer Screening Program helps men and women 50 years of age and older make decisions about colon cancer screening. Get screened for colon cancer today and stay in the game.

[Some Fish are Healthier to Eat Than Others, March 26](#)

Eating fish has numerous health benefits. Fish are a great low-fat source of protein, and they contain heart- and brain-healthy omega-3 fatty acids. Some fish are healthier to eat than others, though, that's why there's a new guide available with information to help consumers make decisions about which fish to eat, limit or avoid, whether

the fish is locally-caught, store-bought or ordered at a restaurant.

DHHS, in cooperation with the Department of Environmental Quality, the Game and Parks Commission and the Department of Agriculture, produced the guide. A copy is available via the website at www.nebraska.gov/eatsafefish.

"Fish and shellfish are lean, low-calorie sources of nutrients good for heart health and brain development, so they're a desirable source of protein," **Dr. Joe Acierno** said. "There are ways to prepare fish, like rack-broiling, to maximize the health benefits and minimize exposure to contaminants, like mercury and dieldrin."

Smaller fish tend to contain fewer contaminants.



[DHHS' New Office Pet Policy Spells Trouble - Tribble Style, April 1](#)

DHHS' annual April Fool's Day edition of Neat to Know brought in the most reader comments from stories with a Star Trek twist, a recipe for Turducken, funny quotes from office-related movies, and fictitious, new wellness plan requirements, to name a few. Thank you so much for joining in on the April Fool's Day fun. We have a lot of funny, creative employees amongst us and we appreciate everyone's willingness to laugh and share comments.



The Good Life: A reminder of what we all share and hope to provide to our fellow Nebraskans



Kerry Winterer, DHHS CEO

There's always a lot going on at DHHS, so I've got several topics I'd like to touch on this month.

First, I'd like to talk about our employee survey. This is the fifth survey we've done, and I urge you to take time to complete it. These surveys are important and have helped us identify ways we can improve our work environment, employee morale, and training

opportunities. Last year's survey saw a 37 percent increase in employee response, and I hope we'll see an even higher participation rate this year.

Another topic is the Legislative session which adjourned sine die on April 17. While only two bills were introduced on our behalf this year, we were involved with many others that could impact us. DHHS staff were instrumental in providing information and working with senators, and in a number of instances, influenced and improved the final version of bills.

Our LB728, which makes changes to the requirement for fingerprint background checks for employees of community-based providers of services for people with developmental disabilities, passed. Our LB711, which would have changed public health provisions relating to contamination of property due to clandestine drug labs, didn't. Neither did a carryover bill from last year, LB260, which would have changed requirements for a behavioral health data and information system.

Twenty-seven bills passed during this session that have a direct impact on DHHS programs and the services we provide. **Bryson Bartels**, our legislative coordinator, is summarizing that

legislation. We'll provide an update on our website and in the next issue of *Connections*. I will mention one resolution now, LR535, that calls for a joint review by the HHS and Appropriations Committees, of the structure of DHHS, as well as structures and functions of similar agencies in other states. I expect this review to begin this summer or early fall.

The session is always a busy time for staff, and I appreciate the work you've done. Not only does our Legislative office headed by **Kathie Osterman** do a remarkable job, but getting through a session requires work from all areas of the Department including Finance, Legal and program areas. This session has been particularly challenging, and I want to thank everyone for doing great work often under pressure.

On a sad note, this month we mourn the loss of one of our directors. **Vivianne Chaumont**, Director of the DHHS' Division of Medicaid and Long-Term Care, passed away April 10 after a battle with cancer. She had served as director since 2007,

and we appreciate her dedication and work on behalf of Nebraskans.

I remember Vivianne saying how much she enjoyed working in the public sector and how she saw policy making as a way to make a difference in people's lives. Medicaid and Long-Term Care is such an important part of state government, so Vivianne was able to make a large impact on the lives of many Nebraskans. It's a good reminder to us all to know that our work here makes a difference in helping people live better lives.



Bikers Against Child Abuse: Big Motorcycles and Even Bigger Hearts

By Russ Reno

Caseworkers have a myriad of resources to help children, including men sporting tattoos who ride big motorcycles . . . “bikers,” in other words.

In this case, a child told her mother that the mom’s boyfriend was sexually abusive, but the mom refused to believe her little one. However, an adult at school did and the boyfriend was arrested. When mom maintained

contact with her boyfriend despite a court order and continued with marriage plans, the court removed the child from the home.

Placed with a foster family, the child began to improve except, as happens frequently with victims of abuse, the child accepted the blame.

Searching for ways to help the child, the caseworker called on a reliable and effective group that had helped other

children in the past. The loud rumble of their engines was the child’s first introduction to these angels on wheels. With leather vests, dark sunglasses and long hair on their heads and chins, two bikers strode into the foster family’s house.

At first, the site of the bikers took the child back, but their training in dealing with abused children soon saw the two members of Bikers Against Child Abuse compassionately talking to the child. They offered a blanket and vest and let the child select a road name.

The two lovable bikers made assurances they would always be available to help whenever the child was scared, day or night, and placed their names and phone numbers in the vest. All the child had to do was call.

Following their presentation, the child realized the blame rested with the boyfriend. The bikers followed up with the child in coordination with DHHS and local authorities before the child was to testify in the trial. Over the months, the well-trained bikers earned the child’s trust and gave the youth the confidence to talk about the abuse. It was easier with the two soft-hearted bikers at the child’s side.

When the child arrived on the day of the trial to testify, the low thunder of motorcycles greeted her outside the courthouse. And, it wasn’t just the two

biker friends who were there, but they also brought many of their friends clad in bandanas and sunglasses who were ready to provide support.

All eyes turned to the heavy clomp of the bikers’ boots as they escorted the child into the courtroom. With the caseworker and BACA members there, the child felt protected and ready to tell the story of abuse. It wouldn’t be the child alone in the stand, but the caseworker and BACA providing encouragement and inspiring confidence. The guilty boyfriend confessed, and the child left with a whole bunch of new and protective friends.



The “Bikers Against Child Abuse” story is part of a series.

Every day, DHHS employees help to produce good outcomes for children and families, making a difference in the lives of Nebraskans. DHHS shares these inspirational stories on the Children and Family Services’ website in a series called “[Pathways of Hope](#).”

New stories appear often. Don’t miss a single one! Subscribe to this series and receive an email update when a new story appears.



Members of the Eastern Nebraska Chapter of Bikers Against Child Abuse. In the middle is Headbutt, President, (BACA members don’t use their real names) who was joined by two other members and spoke to Southeast Service Area employees about what the group does to protect abused children. They’ve been called on by SESA employees to help children. *Photo: Russ Reno*

Best Looking Water Towers

By Becky Schuerman
Drinking Water Program Specialist

The Division of Public Health’s Drinking Water Program held a photo contest for the “State’s Best Looking Water Storage Facility” at the Nebraska Rural Water Conference in Grand Island, March 17-19.

Public water systems across Nebraska submitted photos to showcase their efforts to provide safe, reliable drinking water to their communities. The photo receiving the most votes from those attending the conference earned full bragging rights and the honor of having their water storage facility featured on the cover of the 2015 Nebraska Coalition Water Training Calendar. The 12 runners-up earned the honor of having their facility’s photo as a picture of the month in the calendar.

There were 24 systems that submitted photographs. Winner of the top prize was the City of Ogallala. The 12 runners-up were: Milligan, Otoe County #1, Scottsbluff, Hallam, Blair, Lincoln, Chadron, Bertrand, Trenton, Nebraska City, St. Paul and Exeter.

“I want to thank all who submitted photographs and all who took the time to cast their vote at the Rural Water Association conference,” said **Jack Daniel**, administrator of the Office of Drinking Water and Environmental Health. “And congratulations to the winners!”



You’ve heard of pin-up calendar models? Well, these are pin-up calendar water storage facilities, and they are the best looking ones in Nebraska!

Clockwise, from left:
 First place: City of **Ogallala**
Chadron - One of the 12 runners-up
Lincoln - Another one of 12 runners-up; and
Trenton - One of the 12 runners-up



Embracing Change

By Richard Mettler,
Human Resources and Development

Our DHHS workplace moves at the speed of change, and change is here to stay; we get that. We also understand that our ability to embrace change—to make friends with change—is necessary for success, and personal well-being.

But how do we get there, to that place where we have overcome the feelings of upheaval and loss of the familiar past, and concern, and even worry about the unknown future?

The thoughts below point the way.

“It’s not so much that we’re afraid of change or so in love with the old ways, but it’s that place in between that we fear....It’s like being between trapezes. It’s Linus when his blanket is in the dryer. There’s nothing to hold on to.”
(Marilyn Ferguson, *The Aquarian Conspiracy: Personal and Social Transformation in Our Time*)

The thing we need to hold onto during change is found in the here and now—not in the future and certainly not in the past. People who adapt best to change find ways to throw themselves into change.

Things We Can Do in the Here and Now to Embrace Change:

- Allow change to happen. Avoid wasting energy resisting the inevitable.

*“You can’t stop the future. You can’t rewind the past. The only way to learn the secret...is to press play.” Jay Asher, *Thirteen Reasons Why**

“For after all, the best thing one can do when it is raining is let it rain.” *Henry Wadsworth Longfellow*

- Look for the good news behind this change—previously unimagined opportunities waiting ahead.
- Seek the company of people who you regard as adaptable ‘change masters’ for advice, encouragement and support.
- Avoid the company of doomsayers. These folks are not concerned with your peace of mind.
- Create a personal action plan of things you can do to prepare for the change, and then carry out your action steps. Better yet, do this with a trusted and positive coworker.

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Please email your thoughts, concerns, or suggestions about workplace courtesy and workplace relationships to Richard.Mettler@nebraska.gov. I will email you a response, and perhaps anonymously feature your idea in a future column.



Shining the Spotlight on Nurses at DHHS

Special thanks to the nurses of DHHS as you continue to embrace new technologies, resolve emerging issues and adapt to the changing roles in your profession. You deserve special recognition for leading the way within the health care industry, for providing outstanding care to those within DHHS’ 24-hour facilities and, especially, for helping people live better lives.

On Tuesday, May 6, from 12:00 p.m. to 1:00 p.m., DHHS is sponsoring a presentation in Lincoln called “Going with Flo - The Nursing Leadership Prescription.” **Sheri Dawson**, RN, BS, Deputy Director of DHHS’ Division of Behavioral Health, will talk about behavioral health and how leaders can create healthy work environments. If you are unable to attend Sheri’s presentation in Lincoln, the program will be recorded and available for viewing at www.answers4families.org. For more information, call **Kathy Karsting** at 402-471-0160.



Way to Go!

Statewide and national recognitions, honors and awards

Amir Azimi Receives Henderson Human Rights Award



Photo: Kris Azimi

Amir Azimi, Administrator of Support Services, was recently honored for receiving the 2014 Gerald Henderson Human Rights Award presented by the Lincoln Commission on Human Rights.

This award recognizes leaders in the community for their outstanding achievements in improving human rights, and Amir received this honor based on his philosophy of fostering positive intergroup relations by promoting mutual respect, understanding, and cultural inclusion and acceptance. Amir currently serves as Chair of the Mayor's Multi-Cultural Advisory Committee and continues to be involved with many additional community committees. Because of

that involvement, Amir has received numerous awards in the past including:

- Governor's Affirmative Action Award (2002)
- YWCA MENTors and Allies Award (2003)
- Scholarship for Leadership Lincoln, Executive Series (2004)
- County/City Volunteer Award (2007)
- Key to the City of Lincoln (2007)
- Chief Standing Bear Medallion (2011)

Amir holds a Bachelor of Architecture and Masters of Community and Regional Planning degrees from the University of Nebraska, Lincoln, with an emphasis in Educational Psychology/ Cross-Cultural Communication.

As Administrator of Support Services for DHHS, Amir has had many opportunities to hire and retain a diverse and inclusive team. Amir served as President of State Employees Achievement Racial & Cultural Harmony (S.E.A.R.C.H.) and has provided countless cultural competency training sessions to a wide array of groups & organizations since 1982.

Amir received this special award during a ceremony at the Lincoln Commission on Human Rights annual Civil Rights Conference on April 1 at the Cornhusker Marriott Hotel in Lincoln.

Amir said he is honored to receive the Gerald Henderson Human Rights award. "I had the pleasure of working with Josephine Henderson, Gerald's wife, when I worked for the Department of Social Services."

"Sherry's Minions" Wins N-Focus Training Game

Tracy Poppe, Human Resources and Development, is always thinking about ways to make learning a little more fun. That's what Tracy's job as a training specialist is all about. Tracy came up with a "March Madness" theme game to make DHHS' N-Focus training easier for employees to learn and a little more fun.

March Madness game rules were easy. Teams were made up of supervisory units, and each team selected a name and captain. Tracy quizzed team members on N-Focus information learned in training. Teams received points for correct answers and extra points for providing the correct answer first. And the winners were...

First place: "Sherry's Minions" (Team **Sherry Buhman**, CFSS Supervisor)

Here's what Sherry's Minions had to say about the game: "Why settle for stealing the moon? Our goal is world domination! As you can probably see, we like to have fun on our team. We could also probably be accused of being a little (or perhaps a lot) competitive. Though we certainly take our work seriously, we try not to take ourselves

too seriously and remember that having fun at work when possible makes it that much better! However, we must also admit that we may have had an unfair advantage in March 'Mad'ness, since our boss is a little on the 'mad' side!"

Second place: "The Permanency Beanies" (Team **Olivia Biggs**, CFSS Supervisor)

Third place: "Taran's Tiger's" (Team **Brandee Ehlers**, CFSS Supervisor)

Winning teams were awarded extra jeans days, certificates of appreciation, and the satisfaction of making it into March Madness' top bracket.

[Read more.](#)

SHERRY'S MINIONS



KYLE



AMANDA

MEGAN



In Gratitude

Letters to DHHS employees who are *helping people live better lives*

Sometimes we paraphrase letters and/or shorten them slightly in order for us to include as many as possible.

To: **DHHS employees at the Norfolk Veterans Home:**

From the Norfolk Daily News

On Friday, Jan. 24, a very special dinner and entertainment was put on by employees of the Norfolk Veterans Home for the members' families.

This event was wonderful beyond words—the meal, entertainment and decorations really made it very special. And to think that the employees felt the need to show their appreciation to members' families in this way, when daily they give their all by the loving care and concern to our loved ones.

Anytime that I have been at the veterans home, I am always greeted with a smile and a desire to help—from the front desk all the way through the building.

As for me, I think it should be the members' families that should be showing their appreciation to the staff for the wonderful care that is given to our loved ones.

Thanks to all employees at the Norfolk Veterans Home

Don Davis (Children and Family Services Specialist, Nebraska City),

I applaud your work in this investigation and truly appreciate your documentation on this case. I have other referrals with no reports and spend much time documenting and investigating to get to this point. It is a pleasure to work with an investigator who has your attention to detail and good documentation. Good job bringing this case to the forefront.

Thanks,

Investigator, Nebraska State Patrol

Dear **Marlene Janssen** (Health Program Manager, Lincoln),

As always, thank you for all your help.

I still remember the nice conversation we had about Nebraska about a year ago when I was considering whether to go to North Platte. That conversation factored into my decision to go, and I look forward to coming to Nebraska. North Platte itself is one gem of a town.

Take care!

A Thankful Health Professional

John Kwiatek (Child Support Enforcement Finance Administrator, Lincoln),

I am writing you to "sing the praises" of the staff you have there at DHHS. I recently needed assistance with completion of my child support obligation. Everyone I spoke to in the enforcement and liens departments was over-the-top friendly, knowledgeable and flat out helpful. I wish I had written down all of the names of those who helped me. One who did stick out was **Kristy Buckles** (Child Support Enforcement Operations Specialist). Talk about phenomenal!

As a supervisor, I know how important a great staff is to your success. Kudos on yours!

Sincerely,

A Grateful Client

Saeed Amoun (Social Services Worker, Lincoln Customer Service Center) and **Holly McCance** (Social Services Worker, Lexington Customer Service Center),

Thank you for being there for me!

A Grateful Client

Lori Domeier (Social Services Worker, York),

From the DHHS HelpLine

A client called wanting to thank you for your kindness and swiftness to get things going for him a little faster. He said you helped him out greatly and are one of the nicest people he ever worked with.



The Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services' mission:

Helping people live better lives.

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