

CONNECTIONS

August 2017 VOLUME 16, ISSUE 6

Bringing Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services' employees closer together



In a few short days, Nebraska will be flooded with visitors to see the Great American Eclipse. With some of the best viewing locations in the country, Nebraska is a prime destination to watch the eclipse on August 21, 2017. This is the first solar eclipse in the continental United States in 38 years and will arc from Oregon to South Carolina. In Nebraska, the eclipse will travel 467 miles along the centerline in about 18 minutes according to National Eclipse.

Anyone within the path of totality can see one of nature's most awe inspiring sights - a total solar eclipse where the moon will completely cover the sun. Observers outside this path will still see a partial solar eclipse where the moon covers part of the sun.

While not all of Nebraska will experience the total eclipse, every region of the state will get to experience at least the partial eclipse. Among Nebraska's best viewing locations are

the Homestead National Monument in Beatrice, and Alliance where the Sandhills provide a clear and uninhibited view.

In preparation for the eclipse, DHHS is part of a team of state agencies working together to facilitate the best viewing experience and to protect public safety. The Nebraska Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) is partnering with many state agencies including DHHS, Tourism Commission, Game and Parks Commission, Department of Transportation, Nebraska State Patrol, and Fire Marshal's Office. This working group also engaged the Red Cross and other local partners. Each agency is using their expertise to support communities, local governments, and organizations preparing to host thousands of eclipse watchers.

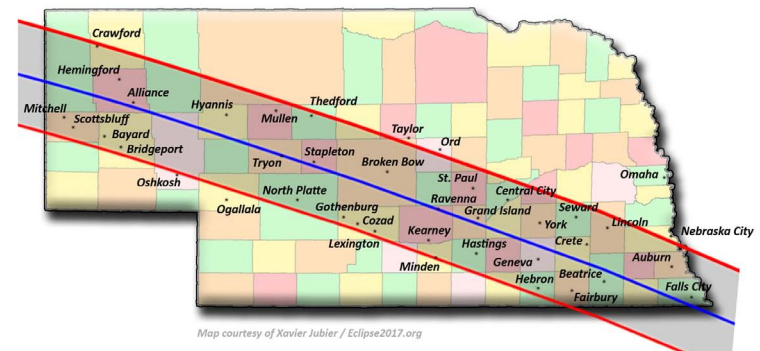
As we prepare for the event, we encourage Nebraskans to plan ahead and use common sense.

Remember:

- Keep weather conditions in mind when in open fields or camping in areas that are dry and may pose a fire risk.
- Purchase eclipse viewing glasses since regular sunglasses do not filter out the harmful rays of the sun.
- Know in advance where you would like to view the event and plan for the day.
- Stock up on water, sunscreen, food, and gas in your vehicle.
- We all know that Nebraska weather can be unpredictable. Be sure to keep an eye on weather forecasts.
- Plan for slower traffic and potential congestion. While estimates on visitors vary widely, we do know there will be a significant increase in travel on the day of the eclipse.

- Stay up-to-date on interstate and highway closures by downloading the Nebraska 511 app or by following [@nebraska511](#) on Twitter.
- For your safety as well as the safety of other travelers, do not stop on the side of the interstates or highways. Find a safe location to exit your vehicle before viewing the eclipse.
- Lastly, as a good rule of thumb, turn your headlights on manually that day.

Please visit the [DHHS Eclipse website](#) for additional tips and resources to make the Great American Eclipse an amazing experience for you and all of our visitors.



The shaded area shows the path of the total eclipse. The blue line shows the longest totality.

Stay Connected on



make the connection . . .

DHHS Public Website: www.dhhs.ne.gov
DHHS Employee Website: <http://dhhsemployees/>

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First Lady Shore Helps Launch CarePortal

First Lady **Susanne Shore** (pictured here) and DHHS officials took part in the launch in Kearney on July 24, of CarePortal, a new service in the state for children and families in the child welfare system that enlists the assistance of churches to help provide for their needs.

The event occurred at Grace on 11th Church in Kearney, which was attended by members of seven churches committed to help answer the calls of DHHS case managers for assistance, as well as members of other local churches considering involvement in the program.

Former Children and Family Services Director **Doug Weinberg** and Central Service Area Administrator **Kathleen Stolz** spoke at the launch and praised the Kearney faith

community for stepping up to help children and families in the child welfare system.

Compass, a local provider that supports, trains and financially helps foster families and youth, is coordinating Kearney's response.

When case managers identify the needs of vulnerable children and families, they contact CarePortal, which sends the request to local churches who commit to provide the assistance. They are then connected with the family. Families may need clothing, beds, transportation or other items to meet their needs.

During the event, the first need was announced. A seven-year-old son was being reunited with his father, who lives in a one-bedroom apartment. The case manager requested a bunk



bed with a full-sized bed on the bottom and a single bed on top, and bedding. The total estimated cost was \$600. Before the event was concluded, a church committed to fulfill the request.

The program will spread to other Nebraska counties by the end of the year as experience with the program is gained in Kearney.

Nebraska is the 13th state with CarePortal, a national initiative headquartered in Kansas City, Mo.

Gekas Steeby Selected to Emerging Leaders Program



Catherine Gekas Steeby, (pictured at left) acting deputy director, policy and communications for the Division of Medicaid and Long-Term Care, has been selected for the prestigious Emerging Leaders Program (ELP) of the Milbank Memorial Fund and the Reforming States Group (RSG) for 2017-2018.

The Fund and the RSG believe that leadership is essential to improving population health. To this end, they sponsor the ELP, a program that aims to help health policy leaders in the executive and legislative branches of states government develop practical, hands-on leadership skills. Taught by *(article continued on page 5)*



Courtney Phillips, CEO

Message from Courtney Phillips, CEO

and I'm following up on the list I made from my visits.

Some team members suggested that when I announce a leadership addition, I should send a photo with the email. This is a great idea. Because of that, we're including photos of some recent additions on Page 6.

Another example that came up almost everywhere was the slowness of Outlook, which some fondly referred to as the "circle of death" and I want to give you an update.

I want to give a shout out to our IS&T team for working hard and finding a solution so Outlook can be more responsive. My non-technical description is that instead of all email immediately going back and forth to the network servers, a copy will now be stored and updated on your computer meaning it will no longer depend on continuous network connectivity to remain available. This should considerably improve our experience. Over 3,100 of our 5,500 Outlook mailboxes have transitioned to the new process and IS&T expects it to be complete by the end of August. This is great news.

Business Plan Successes. In July Governor Ricketts and I highlighted the [achievements from our 2016-2017 Business Plan](#) and released the [DHHS Business Plan for the 2017-2018](#) fiscal year, titled "Good Life. Great Mission. Helping People Live Better Lives."

Kudos to #TeamDHHS! Our success in completing [19 of 25 priority initiatives from last year](#), and making substantial

progress on the others, is the result of the dedicated work of our entire team. This means we completed 93 percent – or 199 – of the 213 deliverables. Great things can be achieved when we're working toward a common mission and shared purpose. These were stretch goals and our success, in addition to everything else accomplished during the year, is incredible!

The new Business Plan outlines 20 priority initiatives for the coming year and also clearly defines goals, identifies deliverables, and compels us to measure progress as we continue our efforts to effectively manage resources. These initiatives will continue to build on the progress we made on some of last year's priorities, while others provide new opportunities for DHHS and ultimately, for those our team serves. What I have learned is that our team is open

to change and ongoing improvement and strives every day to provide strong customer service. Thank you all, again, for helping people live better lives!

Happy 10th Anniversary, #TeamDHHS! Did you know that the Department is celebrating this year?

Twenty years ago, in 1997, five separate state agencies merged to become the Nebraska Health and Human Services System, consisting of three interconnected HHSS agencies. But there was more to come.

Then 10 years later and 10 years ago, in 2007, strategic improvements were made that **streamlined and united us as one agency** and changed our name to the Department of Health and Human Services. Our mission statement, Helping people live better lives, portrays a proud heritage as we celebrate this anniversary through the rest of the year!

Couple these with the State's 150th birthday and we can celebrate "times three!"

One last note. I want to wish all families and kids a great school year. I know from experience what an exciting time this is and what a change in routine it brings! We're highlighting some of our DHHS back-to-school news including health and safety messages on Page 5. I hope they are helpful – feel free to pass them along.

Happy 10th Anniversary, #TeamDHHS!



CEO Courtney Phillips takes a selfie with team members at our Neligh office.

In Gratitude

The Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services' mission:
Helping people live better lives.



Here are some letters & notes DHHS employees have received thanking us for the work we do every day to help people live better lives.

Dear **Yvette** (Resource Developer for Foster Homes in North Platte)

Thank you for all you have done to support us; encouraging words, the phone call. You are definitely a key role in supporting foster parents!!! Thank you for all you do!!!!

Shelly (Foster Parent)

Dear **Courtney Miller**:

I want to thank you for your continuous generosity and leadership. I have truly valued the opportunities I have had as a Psychology intern with DHHS, during this past year. By becoming involved in the LB895 process, attending Quality Management System meetings, and most recently, a DD Advisory Committee Meeting, I have been able to connect with many hardworking and intelligent individuals, and acquired additional perspectives on disability service systems that would not have been otherwise feasible. These supplemental experiences enhance my training in Psychology, and have been an important component of my training this year while at BSDC. I will look back fondly on my time with DHHS, as I move into my career as a psychologist.

Please let me know if there is anything I can assist you or your team with, down the road.

With kind regards,

Teri Krakovich, Doctoral Intern in Clinical Psychology

A shout out to **Courtney Miller!!**

Here is what a parent who attended the stakeholders' meeting on 7/25/17 had to say:

"Courtney Miller, the Director of DD Division ran the meeting herself. This was the most helpful meeting of the four that I have attended (Apr, May, Jun, Jul) due in large part to her breadth of knowledge, her willingness to take all questions, and her patience in answering those questions.

...many of those attending had thoughtful questions and observations for Courtney. So, interested attendees also contributed to the usefulness of the meeting."

I also heard from a provider that attended and that person said that it was a good meeting with lots of information shared.

Way to go!!

Pamela J. Mann, Executive Director, Region II Services

Good morning, **Samantha Pfister** (CFS Program Manager)

I wanted to send you a quick note to let you know of the commendable job **Dawn Peatrowsky** (CFS Program Specialist) has done with a client.

(The client) called the Ombudsman's Office extremely agitated regarding a SNAP overpayment issue. However, before I even contacted the Department to discuss the case, I noted in the narrative that Ms. Peatrowsky had solved the problem and reached out to her personally.

When I spoke with Ms. Peatrowsky earlier this morning to verify the matter had been handled, she was extremely personable and professional. She let me know she called (the client) yesterday to explain what had occurred in her case.

I then called (the client) to follow up and she asked me to please make sure Ms. Peatrowsky is commended for the assistance she provided. She said Ms. Peatrowsky was the first person who was willing to listen to her side of the story and explain what had happened in a way she easily understood.

Our office can't thank Ms. Peatrowsky enough for expertly deescalating this situation.

Yours truly,

Stephanie Beran, J.D., Assistant Ombudsman, Nebraska Ombudsman's Office

It's Back to School Time



As families are out buying school supplies to get ready for the first day of school, DHHS is also busy preparing for the school season in many different areas of the Department. For the first time, we put together a back to school series of news releases covering topics like getting to and from school safely, sharing the road with new drivers, ordering 4,900 TONS of U.S.D.A. food, educating youth, head lice prevention, and reminding parents about the importance of immunizations.

DHHS Will Ship Thousands of Tons of U.S.D.A. Food to About 425 Nebraska Schools, Child Care

Just as families are gearing up for the start of school, the Department of Health and Human Services this week also is preparing orders to make monthly deliveries of more than 4,900 tons of food to about 425 Nebraska schools and child care programs through its Food Distribution Program. [Read the full release...](#)

Getting to School Safely – Tips for Students/Parents

As summer nears an end, back-to-school season is gearing up. The Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services reminds you to safely share the roads with school buses, pedestrians and bicyclists, and provide children with the knowledge to get to and from school safely.

Whether children walk, ride their bicycle or take the bus to school, it is extremely important that they - and the motorists around them - take proper safety precautions. [Read the full release...](#)



DHHS Schools Help Youth Earn Credits, Graduate

A year ago, Jane (not her name) was suffering from untreated mental illness and substance use disorder. Today, she is a high school graduate and working toward a productive future.

That bright look for the future, in Jane's case, was courtesy of a school operated by the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) at the Youth Rehabilitation and Treatment Center (YRTC) in Geneva. [Read the full release...](#)

Back-to-School Health – Vaccinations, Head Lice Prevention

Back to school is a perfect time to check with your child's physician to find out what vaccines he or she may need. Getting children all of the recommended vaccines is one of the most important things parents can do to protect them from serious diseases. It is also a good time to take a few preventive steps to help reduce the spread of lice. You can check your children's heads for lice regularly and watch for signs, like frequent head scratching. Also avoid head-to-head contact during play and other activities. And do not share personal belongings like hats, scarves, coats, uniforms, combs, brushes, hair accessories, and headphones. [Read the full release...](#)

Gekas Steeby

(article continued from page 2)
expert trainers and policy makers, the ELP helps participants identify and address the challenges and opportunities in today's increasingly complex health environment.

Cat will work with emerging leaders from across the U.S. including Wyoming, Delaware and South Dakota. Cat and other participants will also be assigned mentors who have dealt with similar situations in his or her experience.

Trainings will include negotiations in contested environments, building agreement and momentum for change, and evidence-informed policy making.

Since 1992, the Milbank Memorial Fund has supported the RSG, a bipartisan, voluntary association of state health policy leaders from the legislative and executive branches who, with a group of international colleagues, convene regularly to share information, develop professional networks, and work on practical solutions to pressing problems in health care and public health policy.

New Faces on the Leadership Team

During Courtney’s summer tour, some team members suggested she include photos when sending email announcements about leadership additions. This is a great idea, so we’re catching up with photos of recent additions to #TeamDHHS leadership, here:



Bo Botelho
Chief Operating Officer
Bo, former COO with the Dept. of Administrative Services, began June 26.



Theresa Hill
Human Resources Director
Theresa, formerly with WEC Energies Corp. in Chicago, joined DHHS July 10.



Matthew Wallen
Director, Children and Family Services
Matt, former DHHS Chief of Staff, became CFS Director August 4.



Lisa Taylor Jones
Chief of Staff
Lisa returned to DHHS from Nebraska Medicine, starting as DHHS Chief of Staff August 4.

Kroll named NRC Facility Operating Officer

John Kroll, who had been serving as the interim facility operating officer at the Norfolk Regional Center for five months, has been named the permanent facility operating officer.

“In his time as the interim director, John showed the resourcefulness to move forward on process improvement and ability to prepare the facility for Joint Commission Accreditation,” said Myles Jones, facilities administrator for the Regional Centers in the Division of Behavioral Health.

John has been employed at the Norfolk Regional Center (NRC) since June of 1976 as staff nurse, nurse supervisor and director of nursing. John has served on the advisory boards for Northeast Community College Nursing program and the University of Nebraska Northern Division of Nursing (UNMC.)

For the past 10 years, John has specialized in sex offender treatment and has taught students with UNMC’s Northern Division of Nursing about the sex offender treatment for the last several years.

John credits the NRC staff with doing the heavy lifting at the facility. “We have a very talented number of individuals who work at this facility, including psychologists, mental health professionals, social workers, RNs, paraprofessionals, and housekeeping and maintenance staff,” John told the Norfolk Daily News. “We have a lot of staff that are really dedicated and work hard to help the patients to get through the program.”

John holds a bachelor of science in nursing from Briar Cliff University and is a diploma graduate nurse from St. Luke’s School of Nursing in Sioux City, Iowa.



Guest Editorial: Heritage Health integrates care



Thomas "Rocky" Thompson
Interim Director
Division of Medicaid and Long-Term Care

Appeared in Midlands Voices, July 19, 2017
Omaha World Herald

The writer is interim director of the Medicaid and Long-Term Care Division in the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services.

In the July 9 Midlands Voices ("Implementation of Heritage Health stirs deep concern"), Laura Redoutey, president of the Nebraska Hospital Association, discussed challenges being faced by Nebraska hospitals, including the implementation of the new Medicaid managed care program, Heritage Health.

I would like to take this opportunity to share what Heritage Health means for the families, children, persons with disabilities and elderly Nebraskans it serves, as well as reaffirm our

commitment to operating Heritage Health with accountability and transparency.

Heritage Health combines Medicaid's physical, behavioral and pharmacy services into one coordinated system. Medicaid clients must be able to choose their health plan, and Heritage Health offers choice through three managed care plans.

For members, having one health plan responsible for a more complete range of services encourages investment in more cost-effective services that ultimately better address the health care needs of the whole person.

For example, the plans have already helped homeless members move off the streets and into apartments, where they are better able to manage chronic health conditions; enabled a teen using a wheelchair to obtain a membership to a YMCA, where she can exercise in the pool, resulting in a significant improvement in her life; and made it possible for an elderly man to purchase diabetic shoes so he no longer has to wear flip-flops year round.

Redoutey voiced concerns with unpaid claims to Medicaid providers, including hospitals. Since January, the three plans have processed more than 3.3 million total claims. These plans have paid Medicaid providers nearly \$362 million since January,

including more than \$168 million to hospitals and more than \$30 million to behavioral health providers. They are also more than meeting contract requirements to pay a minimum of 90 percent of all clean claims for medical services within 15 business days. At the end of June, all were paying more than 97 percent of clean claims within 15 days, and Nebraska Total Care, which had lagged in payments, had improved to 98.4 percent.

Redoutey stated that her member hospitals still had \$24 million of unpaid claims. The hospital association has said, however, that this \$24 million represents the hospitals' total billed charges and not the Medicaid-allowable amounts the hospitals would reasonably expect to be paid. What a hospital charges and what any health insurance plan will pay may vary significantly.

The health plans have since reached out to every hospital the association identified, asking for detailed information in order to identify and resolve any reported delays in payment — many reported having no claims issues.

Nebraska Medicaid is committed to transparency. A multitude of information is available to the public, Medicaid providers and Medicaid members covered by the plans.

Fact sheets, webinars and other resource materials are available at www.dhhs.ne.gov/heritagehealth. This website also provides access to ongoing reports that show the timeliness of claims paid by each health plan as well the health plans' response times to phone calls from members and providers, among other metrics.

In addition, multiple advisory committees are in place dedicated to quality, administrative simplification and behavioral health integration. Members of the health care provider community serve with state staff and others on these advisory committees and are included in committee activities.

As with any new system, there have been challenges, which we work to resolve as we become aware of them. However, Heritage Health has been highly successful in providing better integrated health care to Nebraska's most vulnerable residents, and it will help ensure that the Medicaid program is sustainable now and into the future.



Nebraska Juvenile Justice Association Recognizes Barner

Peg Barner, Division of Children and Family Services' Program Specialist for the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC) remembers when the Nebraska Juvenile Justice Association was created 42 years ago. Until this year, when she stepped down in anticipation of retirement, Peg has been a part of its growth and success serving on the NJJA Board and the conference planning committee.

Her commitment earned Peg an award at the Association's annual conference citing her years of service and for "always striving to make the Annual Conference ever better."

In the beginning years of NJJA, the conference attracted only 50-100 people for training on how to better serve delinquent youth in Nebraska. Today, more than 400 people attend from various disciplines in the field, as well as from neighboring states.

The conference brings in national and state-recognized experts in their field to provide an opportunity for anyone working with at-risk youth to learn from and network with professionals across prevention, education, juvenile justice, child welfare and treatment systems.

The conference also provides professional development credits for licensed mental health practitioners, legal professionals and criminogenic hours for State Probation.

"We've broadened the scope of the Association and the conference," Peg said. "The conference now brings together current or former system-involved youth with juvenile justice professionals, court officials and youth advocates to learn together in making a system impact on reform in Nebraska."

Peg added the best part of the conference is the award luncheon when professionals are honored for their leadership and service to youth and families, a college student working toward a career in juvenile justice receives a scholarship, and a young adult is celebrated who has utilized supports and services to overcome their personal obstacles.

"To hear their career dreams, dedication to youth and families and success stories is amazing and reminds you why we are in this business together," she said.



Peg Barner with her NJJA Award.

Peg isn't one to boast so that's why it rested with NJJA to pull her up front at the conference and present her the well-deserved award.

"I am more comfortable behind the scenes making things happen. Stepping down from NJJA was to have been kept a secret. To be recognized by so many touched my heart and it was pretty special," she said. "There are many people across the state who are working very hard to make the system better for youth and families. I'm just glad to have been a part of the association that has evolved and become such an effective resource for collaboration, leadership and education."

Congratulations to Peg Barner

In Case You Missed It

Gov. Ricketts Unveils Program Connecting SNAP Clients to Better Job Opportunities

New programming is connecting Nebraska families with good jobs, creating greater financial independence.

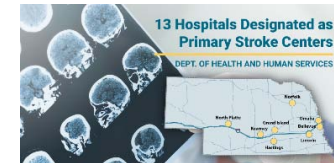
[Read full release...](#)



DHHS Designates 13 Hospitals as Primary Stroke Centers

Goal is timely treatment and better outcomes for stroke patients

[Read full release...](#)



Integrated DHHS Drinking Water, DEQ Wastewater Efforts will Streamline Services to Communities

Streamlining services to more effectively serve Nebraskans.

[Read full release...](#)

