

CONNECTIONS

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

DHHS Business Plan, Priority Initiatives Unveiled

Last month, Governor Pete Ricketts and DHHS CEO Courtney Phillips released the DHHS business plan, a first for the agency. The plan, [“Real Improvements, Sustainable Progress, Better Lives for Nebraskans.”](#) details 25 priority initiatives that are guiding the work of DHHS in the coming year.

“DHHS touches the lives of countless Nebraskans every day as they serve some of our most vulnerable citizens. This business plan will result in improved services and better service from DHHS as they help Nebraskans live better lives,” Gov. Ricketts said.

DHHS has made significant improvements under the new leadership. For example, call wait times at ACCESSNebraska have dropped from 24 minutes in August of 2014 to less than five minutes in recent months. The state’s child welfare system also exceeded all six federal standards last year, only three years ago DHHS met just two of those standards. In May, the Division of Public Health achieved national accreditation through the Public Health Accreditation Board, a significant achievement only a small percentage of public health agencies have earned nationally.

“The DHHS team has stepped up and you can see that in our achievements during the past year,” Courtney said. “Yet we know there is more to do. Through the initiatives in this business plan, Nebraskans will see an even greater commitment to better government, integrity, and fiscal responsibility as we continue to improve our responsiveness and service delivery. This plan projects that commitment and vision.”

Courtney praised the Governor for assembling a wonderful team of directors at DHHS who are working together with staff to improve services for Nebraskans. She said it has been and will continue to be a full #TeamDHHS effort.

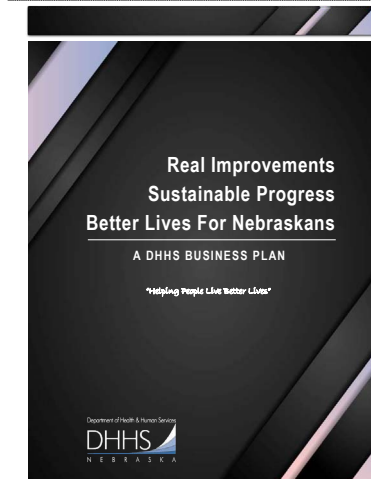
The Business Plan is focusing on the following areas for the next year:

Integrating Services and Partnerships. Integrating services across DHHS into a more effective, efficient, comprehensive,

and coordinated system, and working with partners, will help deliver better outcomes to people served with greater value for taxpayers.

Promoting Independence through Community-Based Services. Community-based services that are built on needs of DHHS’ varied customers provide the supports to help them maintain independence and flourish in their respective communities. Engaging stakeholders through a focus on customer service will guide this work.

Focusing on Prevention to Change Lives. Prevention can take many forms, whether investing in healthy behaviors or improving lives through public safety efforts such as prevention of abuse and neglect. DHHS is working with Nebraskans to achieve lifelong success and potentially save lives.



Leveraging Technology to Increase Effectiveness. Technology is a valuable tool and resource in state government which streamlines processes, provides real-time data, and makes information more accessible, timely, and customer focused. DHHS is looking toward the future at how its data needs will change, and what can be done now to position the agency for tomorrow and into the future.

Increasing Operating Efficiencies and Improvements. A solid Department foundation determines future success. A focus on improvements, efficiencies, and reduction in regulatory complexities will strengthen the Department’s culture, enhance quality and performance, and help the agency better serve Nebraskans.

“This business plan demonstrates a new level of transparency and accountability for DHHS,” said Phillips. “We’re looking ahead with a plan that clearly outlines our priorities for the next year, defines goals, identifies deliverables, and compels us to measure progress as we continue our efforts to effectively manage resources. We’re here because we believe in what we do and we’re dedicated to our mission.”

Stay Connected on



make the connection . . .

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DHHS Employee Website: <http://dhhsemployees/>
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Nebraska Behavioral Health Conference Draws More Than 500

By Julie Naughton

The 2016 Annual Nebraska Behavioral Health Conference, held May 31 through June 2 at the Lincoln Marriott Cornhusker Hotel, drew national speakers and a crowd of just over 500.

"It is immensely encouraging to see such a positive response to the conference," said Courtney Phillips, chief executive officer of the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services, who opened the conference. "The wide variety of topics discussed will allow attendees to help a wide variety of Nebraskans live better lives."

Sheri Dawson, director of the Division of Behavioral Health, noted that feedback from conference attendees – who included mental health professionals, consumers and stakeholders – will inform DBH's 2017-2020 strategic plan. "Your ideas and lived experience will be invaluable," she said in a post-conference note to attendees. "We look forward to working with you to ensure that Nebraska's publicly funded Behavioral Health System promotes quality, effectiveness, efficiency, and accountability. We encourage you as partners to build a behavioral health system that is accessible, welcoming, trauma-informed, and co-occurring capable. Service delivery should continue to promote recovery, wellness and resiliency."

In her keynote speech, *Behind the Shades – Hope Beyond the Darkness*, Sheila Raye Charles discussed the difficult journey of her own life and her relationship with her father, Ray Charles.

Sheila, who did not meet her father until she was 14, became addicted to crack and eventually ended in federal prison. However, it was when she was incarcerated that she began her recovery, she noted, learning to forgive her father – and herself. In addition to a music career, she also runs One Way Up Ministry, dedicated to "lost and forgotten souls" – many of whom are incarcerated.



Sheila Ray Charles

Roxann Hamilton presented Network of Care: State of Nebraska – Connecting Consumers to Support Services for Recovery and Mental Wellness. After explaining what the DHHS Network of Care is – a comprehensive database that enables consumers to quickly locate local programs and services and make informed choices about what they need – Hamilton outlined the programs available in the 93 counties and six mental health regions of Nebraska. They include mental health care, addictions and recovery, family support services, housing and affordable healthcare.

Thomas Durham's two-part presentation, *Motivational Interviewing with Criminal Justice Populations*, focused on how to have a "collaborative conversation" with inmates, covering topics including worth, empathy,

autonomy and affirmation. He also suggested striking the phrase "Yes, but..." from one's vocabulary. "It assumes 'I know better than you,' and forces patient defensiveness," Durham said. "Not changing is now justified in the mind of the client." Instead, counselors should ask open-ended questions, affirm the client, listen reflectively and provide summaries, he added.

Art Romero addressed the growing problem of compassion fatigue, also known as vicarious trauma, noting that behavioral health professionals generally come from a place of empathy and understanding for their clients, but that the psychological effects of traumatic events, such as childhood sexual abuse, domestic violence, war and terrorism reach beyond those directly affected. In some cases, this can induce post-traumatic stress disorder in the behavioral health professional. Those symptoms include exhaustion and physical ailments, emotional shifts, thought pattern disturbances and relationship changes.

Additional topics included how psychoactive drugs alter the normal processes association with neuron function, information about a multi-component, multi-media tool for use by addiction professionals, peer specialists reaching out to veterans in jails, rebuilding healthy families, and cultural considerations in treating Hispanic populations.



Courtney Phillips, CEO

Message from Courtney Phillips, CEO

Gering, Scottsbluff, Alliance, Ogallala, McCook, Cozad, Lexington, and York. Later in July I'm going to travel to other DHHS offices to meet more of you. I'm invigorated just thinking about our exciting work ahead.

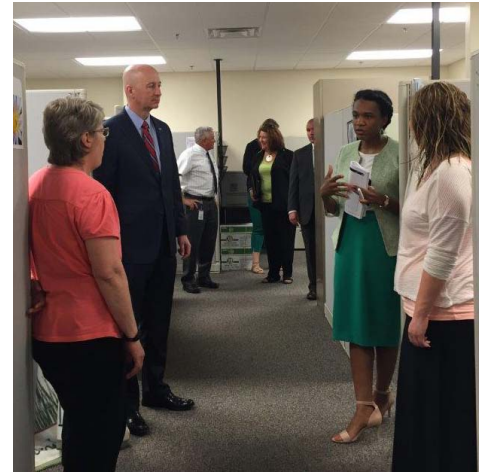
After Governor Pete Ricketts and #TeamDHHS launched our Business Plan on June 20, we had the chance to meet with some of you in Gering and Scottsbluff to discuss how the new Business Plan will impact our partners and our team. We both really enjoyed meeting DHHS staff who work hard to help all Nebraskans live better lives. It is awesome to have the Governor's support behind our initiatives as we are engaged to move the agency forward.

During my trips, I've had the chance to talk to employees, some in groups and some one-on-one, and the same theme comes up in our conversations: communication. Whether that communication is between me and #TeamDHHS or each one of you learning about what is happening from other areas across the agency, communication is one of the biggest keys to our success.

With that in mind, a goal beyond these meetings is to provide open communication internally across the

agency and also with our partners. By working together, we can have the biggest impact on those we serve. After the release of the Business Plan, I heard from one of our partners that "it seems almost unbelievable to those of us who have been through the past few years that DHHS is not only telling us what they are doing but has now turned to telling us what they are going to do!!! Sincere congratulations on a great document, and especially on the hard work and imagination involved in putting it together. Simply outstanding." That was great to hear.

I hope when you read this Business Plan you are energized and excited



about the initiatives TeamDHHS put into place for our Department and those we serve. Our values and core competencies are the foundation for the work we do. They also speak to how we will carry out our functions and represent DHHS.

It's important to remember that when Nebraskans see a DHHS employee, they associate you with the entire agency...not just your division, office or facility. So it's important for each employee to know what's going on across divisions as well as in the department as a whole. You are all ambassadors for #TeamDHHS.

I encourage you to follow DHHS on social media, including Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn for activities that are happening across the agency. This is a great way to keep your finger on the pulse of DHHS.

I look forward to seeing more of y'all and our partners as I continue my town hall meetings later this month. In the meantime, stay safe and enjoy everything that summer has to offer!

Greetings #TeamDHHS:

What a whirlwind this past month has been, in the most positive of ways! With the launch of the agency's first Business Plan to my office visits across the state, I'm grateful and thankful for the opportunities I've had to meet with y'all. You have provided valuable feedback for me as we start a new fiscal year and execute on the elements of the Business Plan.

My travels have taken me across the state to meet some of the amazing members of #TeamDHHS. I've visited David City, Columbus, Norfolk, Center, Pierce, Wayne, Pender, West Point, Grand Island, North Platte,



West Nile is in Nebraska; protect yourself this summer!

One person has already tested positive in Nebraska for the West Nile virus, and summer has just begun. So make sure you take the time to protect yourself when you go outdoors this summer. Here are some quick tips to keep you bite-free this summer:

Preventive tips:

- Wear mosquito repellent when you go outside. Repellents containing DEET, picaridin, IR3535 and some lemon eucalyptus and para-menthane-diol products provide longer-lasting protection.
- Dress in long-sleeved shirts, pants and socks when you're outside.
- Dusk and dawn are times when mosquitoes are most active. Limit outdoor activities.
- Drain standing water around your home. Standing water and warmth breed mosquitoes.

West Nile virus is transmitted to people through the bite of a mosquito that picked up the virus by feeding on an infected bird. Most people who are infected will have no symptoms or only mild flu-like symptoms. Some people will develop a fever with other symptoms like headache, body aches, vomiting, fatigue and weakness. Less than 1 percent of people will develop a serious illness like encephalitis or meningitis (inflammation of the brain and surrounding tissues). People over 50 and those with weakened immune systems are especially vulnerable to the disease and are more likely to experience serious consequences.

“West Nile virus can be a mild illness for some but serious for others. It’s important to get into the habit of protecting yourself from mosquito bites now because we’ve got a summer of warm weather and outdoor activities ahead of us,” said. Dr. Tom Safranek, State Epidemiologist for DHHS.

In addition, DHHS also started surveillance in limited areas of eastern Nebraska for the *Aedes albopictus* or Asian tiger mosquito which can be a transmitter of Zika virus. This particular type of mosquito has been found in very limited numbers in eastern Nebraska previously. The additional surveillance will give public health officials an idea of how prevalent the Asian tiger mosquito is locally.

So far a very small number of Asian tiger mosquitoes have been found in Richardson County. According to Dr. Safranek, this is not unexpected and doesn’t change that Nebraska is considered a low-risk state for the possibility of Zika virus being transmitted here.

For people traveling to an area with Zika, dengue and/or chikungunya, it’s important to practice proper mosquito prevention when abroad and protect yourself from mosquito bites when you return.

For Zika-related traveler information and advisories, go to: <http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/page/zika-travel-information>.

Is Your Family Ready if an Emergency Strikes? Take the time to discuss

by Jean Luther, Hastings Regional Center

If a disaster struck while you were at work would you or your family know how to communicate with each other or where to meet?

Take the time as a family to discuss and note:

- Who your contacts would be for emergencies, both in town and out of town.
- List their phone numbers and email addresses.
- Determine a neighborhood and regional meeting place.
- Keep your work and school information contact numbers current.
- List medical contacts for family and pets, insurance information and current medications.

The information should be kept in a place easily remembered and accessible to family members.

You should also prepare a kit for emergencies. Some supplies you might want to have available:

- A solar-powered or hand crank charger for laptop, to keep small electronics working during a power outage.
- A cell phone charger for your car.
- Program ICE numbers (In case of Emergency) into your phone.

During a major disaster, text, don’t talk! It may be easier to get messages through using a text instead of calling as the lines may be tied up and the lines are needed by emergency workers.

TORNADO ● FLASHFLOOD ● SNOW STORM

EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS CHECKLIST

- Emergency Phone Number
- Email Addresses
- Meeting Place
- Contact Information
- Cell Phone



State Participates in Evaluated Cooper Nuclear State Exercise

Because the DHHS Division of Public Health includes the Radioactive Emergency Preparedness and Response Program, which responds to radiation accidents statewide, staff from the Department participate in all Cooper Nuclear Power Plant tests and exercises.

By: Jodie Fawl, NEMA

A biennial test shows that emergency officials in Nebraska and Missouri as well as staff at the Cooper Nuclear Station are prepared to work together in the event of a disaster at Cooper Nuclear Station near Brownville. After the exercise, officials from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), the agency tasked with evaluating the exercise participants, briefed state officials and plant personnel at the Nebraska Public Power District's emergency operations facility in Auburn. NPPD owns and operates the plant.

The exercise, conducted June 14, was intended to test the ability of state agencies from multiple states, non-governmental organizations and the utility itself to come together to respond to an emergency involving the Cooper Nuclear Station, located three miles south of Brownville. More than 20 FEMA evaluators shadowed participants in the exercise, included more than 50 county, state and federal agencies, including representatives from

Richardson and Nemaha counties as well as Atchison County, Mo.

"It was a very good exercise," said Jon Schwarz, NEMA's Technical Hazards Section manager. "We were able to work through some new procedures, including a new message that would be sent out to the public via the National Weather Service's weather radio network."

Nuclear power stations are required, by federal regulations, in order to address the health and safety of those who live and work near the plant. State and local radiological emergency readiness and response plans, including the activation of emergency operations facilities, including Nebraska's State Emergency Operations Center, were tested. Exercise participants were evaluated on 140 criteria. The evaluations will be compiled into a comprehensive report, then distributed to the various government agencies. Those agencies will have 60 days to review and comment on the report before FEMA finalize its own report. The actual

report will not be available for at least one month. The report will be sent to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission. The exercise covered such sectors as emergency operations management, protective action decision making, and emergency notifications and public information.

"It is important that accurate information get out to the public in a timely manner," said Jodie Fawl, public information officer for NEMA. "The information must be accurate and timely because it will be the basis for the way the public responds to protective action recommendations from the counties and states."

These exercises are conducted throughout the year in order to test the existing plans and procedures that are in place. "Our first priority is the safety of the people of the state of Nebraska," Fawl said. "We need to test our plans and capabilities routinely to ensure that we get it right in the event that a real incident does occur."

The Seasonal and Simple App

Looking for an easy way to find the closest farmers markets in your area? Then download the Seasonal and Simple App for iOS or Android. When you pull up the app anywhere in the state, it uses your location to direct you to the closed farmers market in your area. The app has hours of operation, and in many cases, will give you directions to get there. It also contains all of the produce that is grown in Nebraska, with recipes and preservation ideas. Currently, the app is being updated on Android so it may only list the locations in Missouri. But the iOS version has the Nebraska locations.



*"It is important that accurate information get out to the public in a timely manner"
.... Jodie Fawl, Public Information Officer for NEMA.*


DHHS Papillion Office loses 115 pounds in weight loss challenge!

The DHHS Papillion office has been involved in a weight loss challenge since February 12th. The group of 11 has lost 115 pounds total. Kelly Taylor says they have been doing weight loss challenges in the office since 2013. This was their second challenge of 2016. The group had a six week challenge earlier in the year that started on February 12th and an eight week challenge that ended recently.

Another challenge will likely begin soon. Kelly says, “The staff really encourage each other and we have walking groups for morning and afternoon breaks. We also encourage each other to eat healthy and bring in low calorie options for food days. I made some low calorie pies on pie day so people would have a healthy option, and we support each other to say no when there are donuts in the office.”

Congratulations and keep up the good work!






HEAT SAFETY

Safety Tips for YOU

Heat Safety Tips

- **Slow down.** Reduce, eliminate or reschedule strenuous activities until the coolest time of the day. The elderly and anyone with health problems should stay in the coolest available place.
- **Dress for summer.** Wear lightweight, light-colored clothing to reflect heat and sunlight.
- **Drink plenty of water.** Your body needs water to keep cool. Drink plenty of fluids. (Do not drink alcoholic beverages and limit caffeinated beverages)
- **Spend more time in air-conditioned places.** Air conditioning in homes and other buildings markedly reduces danger from the heat.
- **Don't get too much sun.** Sunburn reduces your body's ability to dissipate heat.



#BeatTheHeat

Heat Safety

#BeatTheHeat

Safety Tips to Keep You Safe

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.

Nancy Lyne,

I just wanted you to know what a great help **Carmen Royle** was today. I asked her to call a client and leave a message in Spanish and ask them to call me back as I had previously left 2 messages and I don't think that the clients understood English. The clients called back within a half hour and will have their benefits tomorrow! I definitely think that this was due to Carmen's willingness to call them for me. Thanks!

Monica Young, SSW

I just want to thank your team in the **expedited birth certificate area** (Vital Records).

I called yesterday in a panic because I realized I didn't have a certified copy of my birth certificate and I'm leaving next week for Puerto Rico to get married. I had a meltdown. Wasn't sure if I had options to get a new one to me in Texas in time. I spoke to two ladies - one I think her name was Kim - they were soooooo nice and helpful and encouraging. They assured me they could overnight one to me for only \$40.

I picked up the over nighted envelope today. I feel so much relief that this worked out and I have my birth certificate now so I can get my marriage license in Puerto Rico.

THANK YOU. I grew up in Nebraska and really appreciated talking to 2 individuals who really do have that "Nebraska Nice" personality.

Just wanted to pass this along in hopes you can recognize that team for being polite, friendly, and hard working.

Stephanie

Dear **Marlys Schmidt,**

This letter is primarily a thank you note for your assistance with this case. The person is my sister and I have been her legal guardian since 2008.

I initiated the transition to Medicaid covered in November of 2015 and it was a daunting task. The assistance that I received from **Jaе Bertrand** in the Kearney office was invaluable during this process and she went above and beyond in helping me with all the paperwork and information necessary in obtaining the Medicaid coverage.

I just want to let you know that it is comforting to know that there are still people who take pride in their work and do a great job and you most assuredly fall in that category.

Please accept my best wishes for a pleasant summer and thanks again for all you do.

Kindest regards,

A Grateful Client

Dear **Mr. Wetjen, staff helpers, & boys,**
(YRTC-Kearney)

Thank you so much for installing our playground border at Northeast Elementary. That was hard work. Our students will be very grateful, too. You truly made a positive difference for our students. Thank you again!

Sincerely,

Cathy Gundersen
Northeast Principal