

Bringing Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services teammates closer together

Governor Pete Ricketts and CEO Dannette Smith Received COVID-19 Vaccine

Gov. Pete Ricketts received his first shot of the Pfizer vaccine at Nebraska Medicine's testing and vaccination site in Millard.

DHHS CEO Dannette R. Smith received her first dose of COVID-19 vaccine in Lincoln's

State Office Building. The shot was administered because the Vaccination Strike Force (VSF) that administers the shots to qualified state personnel in the 1B prioritization group had an unused dose at the end of the day. In a

series of interviews about why all Nebraskans, especially minorities, should be vaccinated, Smith said she falls within the 1B population and is subject to a comorbidity. She encouraged others to get vaccinated.



CEO Smith poses proudly with her vaccine certification card. Gov. Ricketts has consistently encouraged Nebraskans to get their vaccine and set an example by receiving his publicly.

Nebraska Offers Opportunities for Legislative Services Director Lowe



Director of Legislative Services Andrea Lowe joined DHHS last August, reporting to Chief of Staff Emily Dodson. Lowe was charged with elevating the profile of the Office of Legislative Services (OLS) and organizing and standardizing it to more efficiently work with the different players.

The work OLS does can be divided into two streams, she said. The first is managing the legislative

process for DHHS.

"We make sure to coordinate testimonies and responses to bills that are introduced when they impact both DHHS and the people we serve. We see that the appropriate person is over at the Capitol to speak during hearings," she said. "We also introduce legislation on behalf of

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Letter from the CEO about EthicsPoint

NEBRASKA

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DEPT. OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES



Pete Ricketts, Governor

April 5, 2021

Dear Teammates:

The Department of Health and Human Services has workplace regulations that guide what we do and don't do in the course of our duties, and the guidance in [DHHS Values and Core Competencies](#) covers much of the rest. But these are difficult jobs. Sometimes DHHS teammates have to make judgement calls in the course of their work, weighing many intangibles.

Because DHHS holds itself to the highest standards of responsibility and integrity, from leadership on down, these decisions can sometimes become the subject of scrutiny in the workplace. And that's a good thing. All unethical conduct, at any level, can hurt the people we serve and damage the reputation of the Department and the State. Teammates should feel comfortable approaching supervisors or management in instances where possible violations of policies or standards have occurred. But sometimes that's not a good option.

Starting April 5, 2021, a third-party ethics reporting vendor will help DHHS address fraud, abuse, and other misconduct in the workplace while cultivating a positive work environment. Importantly, the service will maintain absolute confidentiality, preventing any retribution or retaliation on whistleblowers. If you are not comfortable using established channels, you are encouraged to submit violations of law and/or of our DHHS core values or policies to the [EthicsPoint](#) site or by phone at (844) 910-2315.

DHHS has made its commitment to open and honest communications a matter of written policy. The [DHHS Reporting and Non-Retaliation Policy](#) provides guidelines and protections for those reporting concerns of ethical misconduct. Reading in part, "DHHS will not tolerate any form of retaliation against an employee for making a good faith report of potential violations," the policy directs reporters of bad conduct who feel they've been retaliated against to report those retaliatory actions, as well.

When misconduct concerns can't be settled through the existing administrative channels, a third party is required, bringing trained and impartial judgement to any report. That's what EthicsPoint offers.

The information you provide through the EthicsPoint website or over the phone will be sent to DHHS through a completely confidential and anonymous basis, if you should choose. You have our guarantee that your comments will be heard. [Click here to read detailed information about confidentiality and other FAQs.](#)

If you have general questions about EthicsPoint or the purpose of the hotline, contact Alexis Trout at Alexis.Trout@nebraska.gov or 402-471-4068. Please **do not** send complaints directly to her as they should be directed to EthicsPoint.

Thank you,

Dannette R. Smith, MSW
Chief Executive Officer

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Helping People Live Better Lives

Vaccine

Lowe

EthicsPoint

Erb

NHA

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Gratitudes

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DHHS to advance its priorities. We're actually revamping that process. We're hoping to get a lot of teammates involved going forward."

The second part of OLS's role is answering queries about legislation, as well as fielding questions and complaints forwarded to DHHS from the governor's office, which is new, she said.

Lowe oversees a two-person team – Bryson Bartels and Sarah Skirry – who each specialize in particular areas of DHHS. Bartels is deeply knowledgeable in Children and Family Services, Medicaid and Long-Term Care, and Public Health and Skirry has taken on Operations, Behavioral Health, Developmental Disabilities, and the 24-hour facilities.

Specialization allows people to gain deeper expertise in their respective areas, Lowe said, so that the whole team can be flexible. Each day is different.

"Sometimes it's listening to the legislature debate all day, sometimes something will blow up, or there'll be urgent questions, or I'll go to meetings at the Capitol to communicate our position on bills," she said.

Lowe says she's from Virginia, because that's the state in which she graduated from high school, but considering her parents served in the military and moved around a lot, she added she's from all over. After high school, she received a bachelor's degree in biochemistry and a master's in public health.

Since then, her work has taken her all over the country. Most recently, Lowe worked in Los Angeles for a year and half.



Director of Legislative Services Andrea Lowe poses next to Marilyn Monroe at Madame Tussauds Hollywood in Los Angeles in March 2019, not long after she arrived there. She took a bus tour of the city to help her learn it better.

"I moved out there for a fellowship in child welfare, and then wound up taking a job with a technology company. And then this opportunity in Nebraska came up and I was really excited to get back into policy-type work."

"Most of my work has been with local and state health departments," she said, "and I've also worked for a few nonprofits, in program management and grants management, as well as policy development. That took me to quite a few places on the east coast, including Pennsylvania and Florida, where I did my grad school work."

"I really like Nebraska," she said. "I was surprised at the variety of the food in the restaurants, certainly more than steak and potatoes. I know I'm not experiencing what I would be without COVID in Nebraska, but I love being outdoors. Just having the space to go hiking, go biking –

it's been great to explore."

Even better, her sister lives in Dallas.

"It's the closest I've been to her in a long time," she said. "I'm going down to see her, so I'm really excited. She has a boy and a girl and they're my favorite niece and nephew."

The location has one other advantage. It's where she met her husband-to-be, a University of Nebraska – Lincoln professor, originally of California.

"We're gonna get married next year, so that's really exciting!"

The new process regarding legislative proposals Andrea referred to moved forward with an all-teammate request for ideas that could become "the law of the land." Ideas were to be submitted by June 11. The all-teammate email of May 17 detailed the process.

Former Teammate Remembers Co-Workers During COVID-19

Jacob Erb remembered his former co-workers when his church was trying to decide how to support people doing their jobs despite COVID-19.

“We were thinking about how we love our city and love our work caring for people in our midst. Well, right here, this is our midst,” he said, unloading snacks and drinks on a bright, cold Jan. 27 in the break room of the Children and Family Service building at 5220 South 16th St., Lincoln.

“I understand how thankless a job this can be. Everybody thinks about first responders, but because I worked here I know how hard this job is,” he said, adding that he had worked for DHHS for two years as an initial assessment

worker.

“It’s been a while since I saw these faces every day.”

About a dozen people descended upon the treats at about 1:15 p.m. with more expected to partake later in the day.

He said the Lincoln Berean Church collected about \$400 for the outreach effort.

Erb had planned to begin delivering treats on Monday, Jan. 25, but the historic southeastern Nebraska blizzard stymied that.

Instead, his first day was Tuesday, when he dropped off bagels. He was able to do another good turn on the trip, pulling a man driving a Kia Soul out of a snow bank.

“I said, ‘You’re in luck – I’ve got a tow strap.’”

He’ll deliver snacks the rest of the week, leaving enough Friday that they’ll still be there the following week. Each day has a planned menu, with the end of the week featuring doughnuts and bunt cake.

“When somebody brings doughnuts, I know I feel pretty good. I wanted to catch the most people by going for a week, because people have different schedules.”

Originally of Bennet, Erb serves as Community Outreach Director at the church at 70th and Highway 2.



Jacob Erb delivered snacks on behalf of the Lincoln Berean Church to his former teammates at the Children and Family Service building at 5220 South 16th St., Lincoln.



Chief Medical Officer Dr. Gary Anthone Honored with 2020 NHA Health Care Advocate Award



Pictured, from left, are Laura Redoutey, FACHE, NHA president; Anthone; and Andy Hale, vice president, Advocacy for NHA.

DHHS Chief Medical Officer Gary Anthone, M.D., was awarded the NHA Health Care Advocate Award, which is presented each year to an individual who portrays “an acute interest in improving health care and invests countless hours in the pursuit of increased access to quality health care across Nebraska.”

The news release announcing the honor said, “Dr. Anthone has been a true advocate for all Nebraska hospitals and health systems during the COVID-19 pandemic. He has been instrumental in waiving certain license fees and background checks in order to expedite the entry of retired, inactive and out-of-state health professionals to help manage the pandemic. In addition, he was influential in expanding testing, working with nursing homes and hospitals on transferring patients and securing much needed personal protective equipment (PPE) to healthcare facilities.”

All of DHHS congratulates Dr. Anthone for this recognition!

Operational Excellence: Text Messages Save Thousands of Dollars During August Storm

DHHS sent texts directly to impacted residents in Nebraska following the “derecho” Aug. 10, a high-wind event which left thousands in eastern Nebraska and Iowa without power.

The text contained a hyperlink to a SNAP (Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program)

form requesting funds to replace spoiled food, saving the state more than \$5,600. Without the hyperlink, the calls at a Customer Service Center (CSC) would have taken 368 work hours, costing the state \$6,282.93. It only cost \$594.84 to send the text messages.

In addition to the savings,

DHHS was able to provide improved customer service. Since recipients did not have to make the initial call to a CSC they were able to take immediate action and avoid call wait times.

DHHS cooperated with power

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Text Messages Save Thousands During August Storm (continued from page 5)

companies to identify those who lost power for more than four hours.

DHHS sent more than 15,600 text messages. Eighty-nine percent or 13,953 of the text messages were received. DHHS received 1,557 replacement requests stemming from the storm, which is roughly 2.5 times the previous high of 630 set in October 2018. Of the 1,557 requests, 95% (or 1,474) were due to the text message that DHHS had sent out.

Normally, whenever a recipient's home loses power for longer than four hours, the recipient would need to call a DHHS CSC. During the phone call, the DHHS team member would collect the recipient's information. After the call, the recipient is mailed a form to sign. They receive the form within 2-8 days and have 10 days to sign and return it. Once the form is received and after the power outage is verified, the recipient would receive his or her benefits.



The summer storm devastated portions of the mid-west, resulting in millions of dollars of damage.



In Gratitude

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

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

A poem of thanks from a client: 'A Hole I Dug'

DHHS teammates report that this woman has made tremendous strides and worked hard to complete “business and accounting certifications through a local community college and work part time for The Bridge in Hastings. She receives minimal SSI at this time. She is coping with some medical concerns. She is completing more accounting classes in order to add to her certifications and job marketability. She has created a positive community and church support system.”

I was digging a hole.	but didn't know how to help me.	They had been in their own holes.
Everyone saw I was digging.	Some threw me some food.	They started by giving my suggestions,
Some told me to stop.	Some gave me water.	Directions for me to help myself.
I didn't listen.	Some gave me money.	I started digging a staircase.
I kept digging this hole.	Doctors came by and gave me medicine.	Each step got easier to dig.
Finally, it got so deep,	That only made me start digging again.	When I got to where I could see them
I had to jump in to keep digging.	But one-day GOD heard me,	They gave me a hand-up,
Now it was so deep all I could see was a light above me.	GOD knew I was ready to listen.	I got a lot of hugs and love,
I hollered for help.	GOD sent a few people.	But I had to learn to do it for myself.
My friends came by,		

Email received by Webmaster Praises 'All Who Work at DHHS'

Received by Greg Votava from a Lincoln, Nebraska, resident:

Dear Pat Lopez (Lincoln-Lancaster County Health Director – ed.) and all who work at DHHS,

I want to commend you and your staff for the tireless work that you have done over the last year to help keep Lincolniters safe during the pandemic. Far too often you and your staff have been criticized for taking the critically prudent steps to keep our community healthy and safe. I, for one, noticed how you stayed the course and chose to stay above the politically motivated arguments, followed the science to keep our community safe, and lead! It is shocking to me to see how many individuals will not take the advice of proven leaders in the field of health sciences... I choose to listen and follow your lead, and advise others to do the same.

I recently took my mother-in-law to get her vaccinations. The process was without flaw! Each person working the event was smiling, helpful, and went out of their way to ensure that the experience was positive. Thank you to all involved! Keep up the great work... there are many of us standing behind you in support!!

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A Well-Deserved Thank You

Received by Marnie Carr, Social Service Supervisor:

Dear Ms. Carr,

I wanted to take a few minutes to tell you what a positive experience I've had working with Margo Johnson. She has returned my frequent phone calls in a timely manner, answering all of my questions with patience and compassion.

I have been working with various caseworkers over the past 18 months, as we applied for Medicaid for my mom, services under ENOA, considered hospice, etc, and some individuals were definitely more helpful than others. Margo has risen above my hopes and expectations and I truly can't thank her enough.

Our family made the difficult decision to move our mom into a nursing home in November, which was particularly painful due to COVID-19. While the conversations leading up to that were difficult and emotional, knowing that I could call Margo anytime with any question offered some comfort in the storm.

People forget how much a simple act of kindness can help, and I didn't want Margo's to go unnoticed.

She is in a perfect role, helping others, across the miles, navigate a complicated system. We are so lucky our mom's case was assigned to her.

Sincerely,
Debbie

The Public Recognizes the Good Work We're Doing

Received by the Webmaster and forwarded to the Lincoln-Lancaster Health Department:

"I would like to commend your people for the tremendous job administering the shots at Pinnacle Bank Arena on Monday. There was plenty of help to direct people and assist those who needed it. To serve 8,000 people in a day is a miracle. People were not complaining as far as I could tell. From the people assisting with parking, all the help that directed people traffic, it was a job well done. Thank you."

Sacred Heart Thanks DHHS Communications for Face Masks

Photo submitted by Beckie Cromer, CFS Child Care and Development Fund Grant Coordinator.



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
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