



NORTH CENTRAL DISTRICT HEALTH DEPARTMENT

Proudly serving the counties of Antelope, Boyd, Brown, Cherry, Holt, Keya Paha, Knox, Pierce, and Rock

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Midlands Voices: Public health in Nebraska is well worth the investment

By Dr. Robert Butz, Dr. Josue D. Gutierrez, Chris Rodgers and Marie Parker, RN

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“An ounce of prevention is worth (more than) a pound of cure”: This ancient adage greatly understates the present reality when it comes to community health. The real work of achieving a healthier community must be done while people are still healthy — through prevention and promotion of good health practices.

To use an increasingly common term, this needed public health work must start “upstream.”

Nebraska’s public health departments are the health promoters who carry the hope of every Nebraskan for a better life. Our departments are guided by the firm belief that everyone, no matter where they live, deserves to be connected to a system in an environment that supports their health and well-being.

Nebraska’s public health departments are in your communities. From dealing with catastrophic flooding, high cancer rates, childhood lead poisoning, lack of dental and medical care, opioids,



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tuberculosis, measles and worksite health, Nebraska's public health departments are your best defense today and your best insurance for the future.

We cannot medicate ourselves out of poor health, yet 80% of Nebraskans' health care dollars are directed toward chronic disease.

Chronic disease is preventable, and no one knows how to prevent chronic disease like Nebraska's public health departments. Health prevention is the most powerful proven health policy tool we have. Studies have shown that investing \$10 per person each year in proven, community-based public health activities could save the nation more than \$16 billion within five years.

That's a \$5.60 return for each \$1 invested in public health.

Nebraska's public health departments know how to maximize those efforts. Creativity and collaboration are in public health DNA, just as growth is in the soil of this state.

That growth is currently threatened by spiraling health care costs and stagnant or contracting funding. Inadequate funding puts lives and health at risk, often among our most vulnerable Nebraskans. It leads to decreased opportunities, a physically challenged workforce, school absenteeism and decreased opportunities for growth even as it saps financial resources.

Local public health departments in Nebraska are grounded in their communities and continue to grow and develop community specific public health strategies. Those upstream efforts are proven to combat chronic disease even as they prepare for emergencies and expand their knowledge to meet the challenges of new infectious disease threats that are only a plane flight away.

From border to border, Nebraska's public health departments cover all 93 counties using science-based, community-driven and collaborative health protection strategies.

Eighteen years ago the Nebraska Legislature used \$5.6 million from the Healthcare Cash Fund to jump-start a statewide public health funding infrastructure. Inflation and the growing



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challenges of an ever-changing world dictate that this infrastructure needs a tuneup. State support has been stalled at the level of 18 years ago, and your Nebraska public health system is at risk of eroding into ineffectiveness.

Today, we are asking our Nebraska partners to join our campaign to increase financial support for these vital community health prevention efforts.

It's time to unleash the power of Nebraska public health. From outreach clinics to health education and the initiatives that keep our lives safe and healthy, public health pays off. We need to keep Nebraska communities healthy and enable public health to be ready for the unthinkable that sooner or later always becomes real.

The best time to invest in Nebraska's public health departments was 10 years ago. The second best time to invest in your public health departments is now.