



Quick Reads

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Holiday wishes

I want to take a brief moment to wish everyone a happy holiday season. To get you in the holiday spirit, I invite you to visit the Lucas Building on the State Capitol Complex to view and bid during our annual IDPH Holiday Wreath Silent Auction to benefit the Food Bank of Iowa. The wreaths are on display in the 6th floor lobby (outside the cafeteria) now and bidding will remain open until Friday, December 13 at noon. Special thanks to the Health Employees Activities and Recognition Team (HEART), which organizes the event each year.

I know this is a busy time of year as you prepare special meals, gather with family and friends, run to the mall, and observe your own personal holiday traditions. I also know that many of you will be working through the holidays as the needs of public health don't take a holiday break. I want you to know that I am grateful for all that you do and for your dedication. Whether you are alone, working, volunteering, or with friends or family during this season, thank you for your commitment to the health of all Iowans. Whatever your holiday plans, I wish you safe travels and much happiness.

Planning for change

Change is a constant in nearly every aspect of our lives and we are certainly witnessing a time of change in the realm of public health. While our mission to promote and protect the health of Iowans remains the same, the workforce with which we strive to accomplish this is changing. The number of local public health administrator retirements has been growing rapidly and will continue to increase over the next several years. The need for orientation, training, technical assistance, consultation, education and support

from [Regional Community Health Consultants](#) (RCHCs) is vast during the rapid turnover of the local public health workforce.

The IDPH [Bureau of Local Public Health Services](#) has initiated a new Quality Improvement project focused on Local Public Health Workforce Tracking. A tool was developed to capture key [local public health agency](#) (LPHA) staff changes by county and region. The objective of the QI project - identification and evaluation of the amount of "churn" in each region - will provide a clearer picture of the workforce challenges LPHAs are facing and the opportunity for increased succession planning. The opportunity to identify upcoming retirements and facilitate succession planning and local boards of health strategic planning will be instrumental as local public health agencies increasingly seek assistance from RCHCs because of changes in the health care delivery system.

Distance substance abuse treatment expanded

The SAMHSA-funded Iowa Recovery Health Information Technology (IRHIT) project has expanded substance abuse distance treatment services to six additional IDPH-funded substance abuse treatment programs through www.recovery.org and other health information technology. Area Substance Abuse Council, Center for Alcohol and Drug Services, Zion Recovery Services, Employee and Family Resources, Northeast Iowa Behavioral Health, and United Community Services join the eight existing programs that now offer substance abuse distance treatment.

Gambling studies released soon

Two important research projects focused on gambling will be released this month. The *Pilot Study of Gambling Attitudes and Behaviors among Iowa College Students* and the *Iowa Gambling Treatment Outcomes System: 2013* were both prepared by the [University of Northern Iowa Center for Social and Behavioral Research](#). IDPH initiated the pilot study on student gambling because it is a mostly hidden phenomenon that may require specialized education, prevention and treatment. Among the key findings:

- Nearly seven in 10 participants had gambled in the past year and 10 percent met at least one of the criteria for potential problem gambling.
- Problem gambling was perceived as different from other addictions, such as substance abuse, because (in part) gambling was not perceived to impact physical health and wellness.

The update in *Iowa Gambling Treatment Outcomes System* includes findings such as:

- Nearly 75 percent of those seeking treatment were doing so for the first time; a much higher percentage than historically observed.
- While up to 90 percent of clients at admission are classified as pathological gamblers, only 2 percent are classified as such after completing treatment.

Both these studies will be published to the IDPH [web site](#) soon.

Congrats and kudos

Community Health Services (Regional Health Services of Howard County) recently received two awards related to quality of care and patient satisfaction: the [Press Ganey Guardian of Excellence Award](#); and the [2013 Home Care Elite](#) winner.

Jill Lange of the IDPH Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) has received the 2013 [Recognized Outstanding Dietitian of the Year](#) award from the [Iowa Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics](#).

The Milwaukee Journal Sentinel recently published an [investigative article](#) examining the delays in newborn screening testing due to hospitals not submitting the specimens to the lab in a timely fashion. Iowa was one of only two states in the country with acceptable turn-around times for specimen receipt and testing. Iowa's newborn screening program was singled out as an example of how to best serve newborns through newborn screening.

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To everyone in public health and all our partners, keep up the great work!

— *Dr. Miller-Meeks*