



April 2022

Spring Has Arrived!

Warmer weather, blooming flowers, and longer daylight hours are finally here! This issue of the *Healthy State of Iowa Employees* newsletter highlights some of the activities we enjoy most this time of year, as well as a great way to enrich your life while making a difference in the community.

Happy National Volunteer Month!

What if someone told you there is a wellness trick to help you live longer, improve your mental health, reduce chronic pain, reduce your risk of heart disease, increase your employability, and increase workplace productivity - all this while meeting local needs and strengthening your community? Research has shown that people who volunteer experience significant health and wellness benefits compared to those who don't.



Here are four easy steps to help you get started volunteering:

1. Determine what causes you care most about - youth, education, animals, health, and the environment are all examples.
2. Think about what skills you have or want to learn - writing, photography, becoming a better listener, woodworking, gardening, etc.
3. Consider what works best for your schedule - same time every week, a short-term project you can do remotely, on the weekends, or evenings with your kids?
4. Once you have a few ideas, reach out to organizations in your area that align with your interests, or search Volunteer Iowa's [statewide database of volunteer opportunities](#).

Bringing a friend or family member with you can both double the fun and the impact you can make. Once you get started, you'll join roughly half of all Iowans already giving back to their communities through volunteering.

Staff Spotlight

Name: Amy Liechti

Current Position: Group Insurance Team Lead - Department of Administrative Services (DAS)

Years with the State: 13 years

My Healthy Choice: Walking outside



"Exploring new areas in our neighborhood or walking through nearby parks is fun for me. During the early days of the pandemic, I walked quite a bit, either with my mom or my husband. It was great exercise and also helped me process and think through our 'new normal.' I continue to walk almost every day, especially when the weather is nice. When I'm in the office, I love walking around the Capitol Complex on one of the mapped [walking routes](#)."

Read *Get Outside and Take a Walk* below for more great information on the benefits of walking!

Get Outside and Take a Walk!

Most people in Iowa don't walk much outside in the cold winds and unpredictable winter weather. But now - at long last - spring beckons us outside with warm breezes, sweet smells, and the sights and sounds of re-emerging life. It's the perfect time to get outside and walk!

Walking can have a bigger impact on disease risk and various health conditions than just about any other readily available remedy, according to Harvard Health Publishing.

The best part is it's pretty much free of charge and causes few if any side effects. Walking for 2-1/2 hours per week - just 21 minutes per day - can cut your risk of heart disease by 30 percent, studies have found, and it also has an impact on fighting obesity.

The benefits of walking outside extend to your brain, too, with improved concentration, increased vitamin D levels, stress reduction, and a boost in your overall mood. The pandemic increased our awareness of how everyday stresses can affect mood, and a number of studies have found that walking outside is as effective as medications for decreasing depression.

Regardless of where you live or work, check out the internet for walking paths nearby. For State employees on the Capitol Complex, there are a number of [routes](#) you can follow based on the distance you wish to walk.



Capitol Complex Farmers Market

If you're in or around the State's Capitol Complex, the Farmer's Market will be back for its seventh year! Vendors and farmers will sell goods beginning in June. See the [DAS website](#) for more information.

Social Connections at Work are Important

Strong social connections in the workplace are shown to make employees healthier and happier. In the last two years, our work environments have significantly changed. During this time, it may have been hard to forge strong social connections in our workplaces. Read Wellmark's article, [Four Benefits of Encouraging Social Connections at Work](#), to discover more opportunities to feel connected in the workplace. Taking just a few small steps can lead to greater job satisfaction and better overall health.

Do You Know?

- [SEHARC](#) (State of Iowa Health and Recreation Committee) connects you with offers for discounted tickets to area events and hosts fun activities throughout the year. If you are interested in receiving information on these opportunities, complete this [form](#) to be added to SEHARC's mailing list or follow them on Facebook!
- [DAS Employee Assistance Program](#) (EAP) provides resources, monthly seminars, counseling services, and more.
- For more great information, be sure to check out these Wellmark publications - [Wellmark Blue Magazine](#) and [Blue at Work](#).

The *Healthy State of Iowa Employees* quarterly newsletter is a cooperative effort between the Department of Administrative Services, Wellmark, and the State of Iowa Wellness Champions' Education and Engagement Committee. It's designed to help keep State of Iowa employees connected and informed of wellness opportunities around the state.

If you have questions or suggestions for future content, please contact us at healthyemployees@iowa.gov.