



January 2025

Frosty New Year!

For many of us, winter can feel like an unwelcome visitor that arrives too soon and lingers far too long. Rather than complain, though, how about crafting this winter season as a time filled with valuable rest and maybe even transformation. Who knows? You may even find some fun along the way!

This issue of the *Healthy State of Iowa Employees* newsletter highlights some of the activities we enjoy most this time of year, including opportunities to make a difference in the community where you are needed most.



Individuality and Trends in Fitness

Americans commonly resolve to 'get fit' and 'exercise more' in the new year. While the foundation for a healthy lifestyle also includes a nutritious diet, quality sleep, and adequate hydration, improving fitness is an important endeavor.

One of the great things about getting fit is that it can be done with any number of diverse activities, based on your individual abilities and interests. Some upcoming fitness trends to watch include:

- Wearable technology continues to get smarter and provides individualized information that may help with motivation and consistent effort toward your improvements.
- Mobile fitness apps extend your workout options by tracking daily activity outside of your formal exercise times.
- The popularity of Pilates and hybrid group exercise continues to increase.
- According to Strava, a popular fitness tracking app, 57 percent of fitness participants prefer a workout length of 45 to 60 minutes, with some intense workouts balanced by stretching, recovery and mobility training. It's important to choose what is sustainable for you at your current fitness level. Injuries are no fun.

Fitness programming offers benefits beyond the physical. The time you schedule for movement may be your mindful 'me time' to help you destress and reset your thoughts on those things you value. Conversely, your preference for movement may include social wellness, as many choose to join a running club, an exercise class, or team sport.

Creating a fitness plan and placing it on your calendar can help you to prioritize time for your fitness routine. While many may keep a set schedule at the gym, others do well to incorporate movement whenever possible. Setting a timer to climb stairs in your home or do calisthenics for a set duration can make up for when inclement weather or a hectic schedule derail plans for getting in a workout away from home.

Staff Spotlight

Name: Heather Kriener



Current Position: Financial Literacy Director at the Department of Insurance and Financial Services

Years with State: 4 years

My Healthy Choice: Powerlifting

“When it comes to exercise, I firmly believe the best workout is the one you will actually do. After experimenting with many different types of exercise over the years, I found that for me, it’s powerlifting. Over the course of the last four years, I’ve slowly shifted my focus from what my body looks like to what my body can do. It has both improved my relationship with my own body

image and is the perfect outlet for me to challenge myself and see measurable improvement. I have competed in two local push/pull (bench/deadlift) competitions, with my third scheduled for this spring. I look forward to continuing to reap the benefits of weight training as I age, including keeping up with my kids for years to come.”

Give Back, Feel Good: The Mental Health Benefits of Volunteering

Volunteering offers much more than just a way to give back to the community—it can also have a profound impact on your mental well-being. Numerous studies show that regular volunteer work can significantly reduce symptoms of depression and anxiety.

When you help others, your brain releases chemicals like dopamine and serotonin, which improve your mood and create a sense of accomplishment. This natural “helper’s high” can lead to reduced stress and improved mental clarity, allowing you to approach challenges at work and in your personal life with a more positive mindset. Furthermore, volunteering gives you a break from daily routines and worries, offering a healthy distraction that can relieve anxiety.

Volunteering also helps foster social connections, which are critical for mental health. When you work with others on a shared goal, it builds a sense of belonging and support, helping you feel more grounded and less isolated. So, call a friend and make plans to volunteer together, or make new friend while you volunteer! [Check out Volunteer Iowa’s statewide volunteer database](#) for opportunities in your area.



Small Steps, Big Impact: Financial Tips for the New Year

Now is the perfect time to reflect on last year's spending and set goals for 2025. Here are some practical tips to help you reach your goals for this year and beyond.

Create a Budget

- **Track your income and expenses:** You can’t make effective changes to your spending habits unless you understand where your money is going. Identifying spending categories and keeping track of your expenses is a crucial step in managing your finances effectively.
- **Do what works best for you:** Consistency is key. Pick a budgeting method that fits your lifestyle and that you can stick with. Budget templates are available at [save4lateriowa.gov](#).



Cut Your Expenses

- **Identify variable expenses:** These are costs that change based on usage or consumption and can vary throughout the year. Variable expenses can include food, utilities, etc. This is where you can make the easiest impact.
- **Evaluate wants vs. needs:** Separating needs and wants can help you prioritize your spending.
- **Eliminate Waste:** Evaluate your purchases to assure you're not buying items you won't use.
- **Cut out underutilized subscriptions, streaming services, and memberships.**
- **Meal Planning:** Prior planning can be helpful, saving you time and money, and allowing for healthier food choices.

- Planning ahead can also decrease food waste. According to the USDA, the average family of four spends \$1500 annually on food that is never eaten.
- Meal planning can decrease impulse spending - Stick to the plan. Quick trips to the grocery store for forgotten items cost you 54% more as you pick up more items than intended.

Decrease energy usage

- Switch to LED bulbs
- Use cold water in laundry to reduce the cost of heating the water.
- Properly seal drafty windows with caulk and window insulation kits.
- Unplug unused electronics.
- Keep filters clean to increase appliance efficiency.

Set Savings goals

- **Set SMART goals:** Ensure your goals are Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Timebound.
 - Instead of, “I want to start saving for my child’s college education.” Try, “I want to save \$10,000 for my child’s college education in an ISave 529 plan by the time my child graduates (May 2035).”
- **Break large goals into smaller goals.**
- Goal 1: I will put \$1500 from my tax return into a 529 college savings plan by April 2025.
- Goal 2: I will decrease my monthly grocery expense by \$50 per month by December 31, 2024. I will reallocate the \$50 saved monthly to my child’s college fund.
- **Utilize Tools and Resources:** Retirement, compound interest, and other calculators can be found on <https://save4lateriowa.gov> to assist you in creating a plan to reach your goals.

By following these tips, you can take control of your finances and make the most of your money in the new year. Remember, the keys to financial success are consistency and planning.

Well-Being Webinars Offer a Wealth of Information

Through the work of the Healthy State of Iowa Employees initiative, the Department of Administrative Services has partnered with Wellmark to provide on-demand well-being webinars each quarter. These webinars focus on a variety of health-supporting topics.

Register for the first webinar of 2025:

[Food Rules: Understand How to Simplify Nutrition](#)

Learn techniques to eat healthier without a complete life overhaul. Become familiar with easy food rules to live by, and gain tips for meal prep and planning.

Take Action!

- Wherever you are in your mental health journey, the State of Iowa offers tools and benefits to support you and your family. In collaboration with Wellmark, DAS has three guides to assist you, your family, and those who work in a supervisory capacity:
- [Healthy Everywhere Guide for Employees](#) - A guide to building better mental health at work and home.
- [Healthy at Work Guide for Leaders](#) - A leader's guide that outlines important information to help you support employee well-being at work, at home and everywhere in between.
- [Healthy at Home Parents' Guide](#) - A guide to supporting your child’s mental health.

- [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!
- Check out the DAS [Employee Assistance Program](#) (EAP) for a number of on-demand seminars covering various topics related to health and well-being. EAP also offers confidential resources at no cost to help employees and eligible family members address challenges.
- For more great information, be sure to check out these Wellmark publications - [Wellmark Blue Magazine](#) and [Blue at Work](#).

To learn more about how Healthy EmployeesSM Powered by Wellmark is working with the State of Iowa to make the healthy choices easier for you, visit the [DAS Health and Well-Being webpage](#).