



For **Immediate Release**
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Health Department Seeks Additional Community Input for Health Improvement

“What are the most pressing health issues in our four-county health district?” “What health priorities should we focus on as a community over the next 6 years?”

Michele Bever, Executive Director for South Heartland District Health Department (SHDHD), asked these questions on two Tuesdays, September 18th and 25th, when community members and leaders assisted SHDHD to evaluate community health data and to prioritize health issues. These two meetings were the culmination of more than 8 months of planning and gathering data and opinion through three types of assessments.

Now the health department is sharing these health data more widely with the community and asking for additional input. “The community health assessments looked at the population’s health status in Adams, Clay, Nuckolls and Webster counties,” Bever said, “ as well as what people think is important about their communities, what external changes and conditions are likely to impact the population’s health in the future, and how the public accesses health care.”

The reports and fact sheets are now available for review on South Heartland’s website, along with a comment form for input from community members. Interested individuals may access these reports online at <http://southheartlandhealth.org/what-we-do/chip.html>, now through October 31st, 2018.

According to Bever, the top 4-5 health issues will serve as the basis for a new community health improvement plan. “Choosing priorities allows us, along with our community partners, to focus our combined efforts on those issues that are most important to the community. With a concerted approach to strategies, time and resources, we are more likely to make progress and to make a bigger impact.”

The cycle of community assessment, health improvement planning, and action is standard practice for public health departments. According to Bever, “the health department goes through this comprehensive process every 5-6 years to review how we are doing, identify new health issues, set priorities, and then make a plan to address those priorities.” Bever said the new Community Health Improvement Plan will be ready in early 2019.

Bever said the assessment, strategy and planning processes require teamwork from key partners in all four counties. The core planning team includes representation from Brodstone Memorial Hospital, Webster County Community Hospital, Mary Lanning Healthcare, Clay and Webster County professionals with expertise in public health and mental health, and the United Way of South Central Nebraska.

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