



February 2026

Waiting for Spring!

Spring never seems to get here soon enough! Yet, here we are - it's February! We've been here before and, as we always seem to point out, February is a short month. Somehow, that fact makes us feel better, and we usually throw in the observation that any snow or cold weather we get from here on out won't stick around long. While the weather in February and March can be a roller coaster, the promise of spring is not far off. Enjoy this issue of the *Healthy State of Iowa Employees* newsletter which highlights some of the activities we enjoy most this time of year, including opportunities to make a difference in the community.



Thinking About Retirement? Starting Early Makes a Big Difference.

Saving even small amounts of money at a time can grow into something much bigger over the years. When you start early, your money has more time to work for you—and compound interest does a lot of the heavy lifting. Even small contributions can add up in a big way when you give them time.

If you're a state employee, don't forget about the [Iowa Retirement Investors' Club](#). When you enroll, you can receive an **employer match of up to \$75 per month**. That's free money for your future, and not something you want to leave on the table. Enrollment is always open and can be completed in [Workday](#).

Not sure where to begin or want a refresher? You may be surprised to know that the Department of Insurance and Financial Services offers **free, online financial-education resources** for anyone looking to build confidence around money. Check out [Planning for Retirement](#), a free, self-guided course that walks through the basics of saving for retirement, setting realistic goals, and understanding your options. Whether retirement is years away or just around the corner, this course makes it all feel doable—your future self will thank you!

Staff Spotlight



Name: Jason Frerichs

Current Position: Department of Inspections, Appeals & Licensing (DIAL)

Years with State: 1 year, 2 months

My Healthy Choices: Exercise, food tracking, and mental health support

"Thanksgiving of 2023 was my wake-up call. I weighed in at 410 pounds. I wasn't a fat kid, and nobody in my immediate family is fat. In fact, I'm a former college soccer player. I believe that when a person becomes obese for nonmedical reasons there is usually an intense sadness behind that. I had lost weight before but always regained it due to unresolved mental health issues. I decided to start therapy at the same time. Getting treatment for my anxiety and depression was a game changer.

I started out slowly. Initially, I started by walking my dogs for 30 minutes twice a day. I did that for a month and lost 20 lbs. That motivated me to start going to the gym. I also started tracking what I ate. I didn't try to change everything all at once, but made small changes over time. Portion control and cutting out soda were the first things I did. I started tracking my calories via MyFitnessPal and gradually increased my workouts.



Currently, I exercise twice a day/5 times a week. I do 30 minutes of cardio on the elliptical during my lunch break and 20 minutes on an exercise bike and weight lifting afterwork. My current weight is 268 lbs. I have lost a total of 142 lbs. I am 6'3" so my goal weight is 200 lbs., which is what I weighed when I graduated from high school and played soccer in college. I believe I will lose the remaining 68 pounds by the end of 2026."

*Top Photo, left - Recent picture of Jason
Photo, left - Jason's "before" picture*

Wearables: These Days They're More Than Just Step Counters

Think wearables are just for counting steps? Think again. Today's wearables, like smart watches, rings, and bands, have evolved far beyond tracking steps or workouts. Many devices now monitor metrics to help users see patterns over time and better understand how sleep, stress, activity, and daily habits affect overall well-being.



What wearables can monitor

- Heart Rate Variability (HRV) – A key indicator of stress and recovery
- Sleep stages – Light, deep, and REM cycles for better rest insights
- Breathing rate and blood oxygen levels – Useful for fitness and overall health
- Skin temperature trends – Spotting changes that may signal illness
- Stress and recovery Indicators – Helping you manage mental well-being
- Cardiovascular fitness and biological age estimates – Long-term health markers
- Safety features – Fall detection and emergency alerts for peace of mind

Why this matters

These metrics reveal patterns over time, helping you understand how sleep, stress, activity, and daily habits impact your well-being. For example:

- Poor sleep quality can affect mood, productivity, and immune function.
- HRV trends can signal when your body needs rest or when you're ready for intense activity.
- Blood oxygen monitoring can help detect breathing issues early.

Remember that wearables are awareness tools, not diagnostic devices.

Readings can fluctuate daily—focus on trends, not single numbers. Use this data to support healthy habits and informed conversations with your healthcare provider.

Learn more with these resources

[Wearable Health Devices Evolve Beyond Fitness: Heart, Stress, Sleep, and Reproductive Tracking](#)

[What Is Heart Rate Variability \(HRV\)?](#)

[Can Smartwatches and Heart Monitors Help Prevent Heart Disease?](#)

In the New Year - Volunteer!

The new year has presented us with the perfect opportunity to start something meaningful, like volunteering! Giving your time and talents to help others not only strengthens your community, it can also align with personal goals you may already have considered.

Looking to spend more time with friends or family?

Volunteering together is a great way to bond while making a difference. Want to be more active? Many volunteer

opportunities get you moving, whether it's helping at events, delivering meals, or pitching in at community clean-up days. Hoping to improve your health and well-being? Research shows



volunteering can reduce stress, boost happiness, and even improve physical health.

No matter what your goals are, volunteering can fit right in and make reaching them even more rewarding. Start small, explore causes you care about, and see where it leads. Every hour you give helps build a stronger, more connected community.

Ready to get started? Visit [Volunteer Iowa](#) to find volunteer opportunities near you.

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 of you 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 [Healthy Employees](#) website.

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.