

IOWA
Department of Administrative Services

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Fall into Healthy Habits!



As the seasons change and summer gives way to cooler days, fall offers a natural opportunity to reset, refocus and embrace healthy routines. Whether it's spending time outdoors, trying a new activity or making time for the things that help us feel our best, small changes can make a big difference.

Enjoy this issue of the *Healthy State of Iowa Employees* newsletter, featuring seasonal activities, wellness resources, and opportunities to help you thrive this fall.

Staff Spotlight



Name: Audra Hiebert
Current Position: Floodplain & Dam Safety - Program Coordinator, Department of Natural Resources
Years with the State: 3 years, 5 months
My Healthy Choices: Volunteering

For Audra Hiebert, wellness isn't just about physical health — it's about living with purpose, connection, and a heart for serving others. Giving back has always been a meaningful part of her life, and she believes that even small acts of service can make a lasting impact in a community.

Audra stays actively involved in several organizations that support youth, strengthen families, and help communities thrive. She is the Charter President of the Exchange Club of Des Moines, serves on the Board of Directors for Girl Scouts of Greater Iowa, and is the Treasurer for 100+ Women Who Care Des Moines. She is also an active member of Camping 4 Girls and Chapter B.A. of P.E.O. Through these roles and many hands-on service projects, she works alongside others who share a commitment to strengthening their communities.

Her passion for service started early. Growing up in a family where volunteering was simply a way of life, she saw firsthand the impact of showing up for others and investing time in causes that matter. That example shaped the way she approaches leadership and community today.

For Audra, the “why” behind serving is simple: there is such a need for volunteers in every community. Whether it’s helping with a one-time service project or committing to serve on a board or committee, giving our time and talents truly makes a difference. Strong communities are built by people who are willing to step in, lend a hand, and invest in something bigger than themselves.

Volunteering isn’t just about helping others; it also creates connection, purpose, and a sense of belonging. Being part of that ripple effect is what continues to inspire her to serve. When people come together to care for their community, everyone benefits.

(Giving) Back to School

As a new school year begins, it’s a perfect time to think about “giving back to school” by sharing your time and talents with the young people who fill our classrooms. Volunteering as a mentor is one of the most powerful ways to support students – offering guidance, encouragement, and a steady presence that can help shape their confidence and success. Mentors often report lower stress, improved mood, and a deeper sense of purpose, all of which contribute to better overall health.

But mentoring is just one way to give back. Volunteers can help prepare school supplies, support reading programs, assist with after-school activities, or lend a hand at community events that strengthen families and schools. Staying active through service promotes mobility, builds social connections, and boosts cognitive health, the benefits of which extend far beyond the hours you give.

This fall, as students settle into new routines, consider adding volunteering to yours. Whether you choose to mentor a young person, support another school-related activity, or do something else entirely, your efforts can make a meaningful impact while improving your own well-being. “Giving back to school” is a healthy habit that supports strong schools, strong communities, and a stronger you.

Action step: Find a mentoring program near you or search a variety of volunteer opportunities across Iowa.

Your Mid-Year “Financial Report Card”

Can you believe we're already halfway through the year?

January is when many of us set financial goals. We promise ourselves this will be the year to save more money, pay down debt, stick to a budget, or build an emergency fund. By summer, life has usually gotten busy. Unexpected expenses pop up, priorities change, and those goals may have slipped to the bottom of the list.

That is why now is the perfect time for a mid-year money check. You do not need to wait until January to get back on track. A quick review of your finances can help you finish the year stronger than you started.

Check Your Budget

One of the best places to begin is by looking at your spending over the past few months. Pull up your

bank or credit card statements and look for patterns. Are you spending more on dining out than you realized? Are there subscriptions you forgot you were paying for? Have grocery trips turned into expensive impulse shopping? Small expenses may not seem like much on their own, but they can add up over time.

As you review your budget, look for a few easy ways to save money:

- Cancel unnecessary subscriptions and memberships.
- Review your streaming services.
- Pack your lunch during the week instead of eating out.
- Plan your grocery trips, make a list, and avoid impulse purchases.
- Cut back on convenience purchases like coffee, snacks, or food delivery.
- Compare prices for services like your cell phone plan, internet, or insurance to see if you could lower your monthly bills.

You do not have to make every change on this list. Even finding an extra $25 or $50 each month can help you reach your goals faster.

Review Your Goals
Next, think back to the financial goals you set at the beginning of the year. Are you making progress? If not, do not get discouraged. Life happens. Instead of giving up on your goals, adjust them to fit your current situation. If saving $100 each month is not realistic, could you save $50? Progress is still progress, even if it happens more slowly than you planned.

Start Saving for the Holidays Now
While you are reviewing your finances, take a moment to think ahead. The holidays may be months away, but they have a way of arriving quickly. Between gifts, travel, decorations, meals, and holiday activities, the costs add up fast. Many people rely on credit cards to cover those expenses, then spend months paying off the balance.

Instead, start building a holiday fund now. Estimate what you normally spend during the holiday season and divide that amount by the number of months left before the holidays. Setting aside a little each month can help you avoid financial stress later and make it easier to enjoy the season without worrying about how you will pay for it.

Finish the Year Strong
A mid-year money check is not about being perfect. It is about making sure your spending still matches your goals and making small changes while there is still time. Even one or two adjustments today can put you in a better position by the end of the year.

Take an hour this week to review your budget, check your progress, and make a plan for the months ahead. Your future self will be glad you did.

For more free tools and resources to help you budget, save, and plan for the future, visit save4lateriowa.gov.

Annual Physical Exams for Back-to-School

Have you started crossing things off your back-to-school checklist? Don't forget about your child's annual physical or well child visit. Read this article from Wellmark Blue for more information about the

types of exams available. Be sure you understand what your plan covers and what your out-of-pocket costs might be.

Your Guide to Meal Prepping

It's August, which means many families are starting to plan for the back-to-school schedule change. Many of us might even be starting to think about that dreaded question – *what's for dinner?* Meal prepping can help make dinner healthier, quicker, and could even save money. Read on for more for tips and tricks or check out the Spend Smart. Eat Smart.® site for other ideas and recipes.

Take Action!

- Mark your calendars for the Healthiest State Initiative's Annual Walk on October 7th. The Annual Walk is an opportunity to join thousands of other Iowans statewide in walking for 30 minutes to raise awareness of the importance of physical and mental well-being in Iowa. Workplaces, schools, organizations, and cities are all encouraged to register a walk and participate.
- 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
- 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 Employees℠ 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@das.iowa.gov.