

Our Vision: Healthy People in Healthy Communities
Adams, Clay, Nuckolls and Webster Counties

For Immediate Release: April 30, 2020
For more information contact: Michele Bever, PhD, MPH, Executive Director
402-462-6211 / 1-877-238-7595

South Heartland District Health Department Awarded National Accreditation through the Public Health Accreditation Board

Accreditation through PHAB Demonstrates SHDHD’s Commitment to Excellence in Serving the 4-County District

Hastings, Neb – South Heartland District Health Department (SHDHD) Board President Nanette Shackelford announced that the health department was awarded national accreditation through the Public Health Accreditation Board (PHAB). Established in 2007, PHAB is the nonprofit organization that administers the national accreditation program, which aims to improve and protect the health of the public by advancing and transforming the quality and performance of governmental public health agencies in the U.S. and abroad.

“We are so pleased to be recognized by PHAB for achieving national standards that foster effectiveness and promote continuous quality improvement,” said SHDHD Executive Director Michele Bever, PhD, MPH.

Shackelford said she hoped this announcement, “coming as it does in the midst of the department’s rapidly unfolding public health response to the COVID-19 pandemic, will reassure our community, our partner organizations, our funders and our elected officials that the services we provide are as responsive as possible to the needs of our community. By continuing to improve our services and performance, we can be sure we are meeting the public health needs of those we serve.”

This month, PHAB announced it had awarded five-year accreditation status to 20 health departments. Among the 20 departments, 13, including SHDHD, achieved the prestigious designation for the first time, and seven successfully completed the review process required to maintain their national accreditation status for five more years.

To receive national accreditation through PHAB, a health department must undergo a rigorous, multi-faceted, peer-reviewed assessment process to ensure it meets nationally established public health quality standards and measures. PHAB-accredited health departments range in size from large state health departments serving tens of millions of people to small local health departments serving communities of fewer than 50,000 people.

Every day, people and communities trust public health departments to provide essential services that will keep them healthy, protect them from diseases and injuries, and ensure that their food and water is safe. During public health emergencies such as the current COVID-19 pandemic, health departments are a community's lifeline for providing services, information, and guidance that can save many lives. To honor the trust that is placed in them and ensure they are providing the highest standards of service, more and

more health departments are seeking national accreditation through the Public Health Accreditation Board (PHAB).

South Heartland District Health Department is among the smaller health departments to achieve accreditation through PHAB. Speaking on behalf of the department's six full-time and six part-time employees, Executive Director Michele M. Bever, PhD, MPH, emphasized that "even a small rural public health department like ours" can attain this status."

"We are thrilled to be an accredited health department," Bever said. "We now have firsthand proof of the value of accreditation's evidence-based guidance for performance management, quality improvement and engagement of staff. Through the accreditation process, we leaped forward in our activities around enforcing public health laws and establishing and utilizing an ethics process. Most recently, in responding to the COVID-19 threat, our six full-time and six part-time staff have been working long hours with lots of overtime. In the midst of this, we called an emergency Ethics Committee meeting to deliberate on some emerging issues. We were very glad to have this in place; their input was invaluable to guide our decision-making processes at a critical juncture."

"The national accreditation program, which receives support from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, sets standards against which the nation's governmental public health departments can continuously improve the quality of their services and performance. More than 80 percent of the U.S. population now reap the benefits of being served by a health department that has undergone PHAB's rigorous, multi-faceted, peer-reviewed assessment process to ensure it meets a set of quality standards and measures."

"The value of becoming nationally accredited through PHAB extends far beyond the interior walls of the health department," said PHAB President and CEO Paul Kuehnert, DNP, RN, FAAN. "People living and working in communities served by these health departments can be assured that their health department is strong and has the capacity to protect and promote their health. Just going through the accreditation process itself helps health departments pinpoint the areas that are critical to improving the work they do for their communities."

Often called the "backbone" of the public health system, public health departments are on the front lines of communities' efforts to protect and promote health and prevent disease and injury. Across the nation, health departments provide services aimed at promoting healthy behaviors; preventing diseases and injuries; ensuring access to safe food, water, clean air, and life-saving immunizations; and preparing for and responding to public health emergencies.

"We congratulate the South Heartland District Health Department for working to serve its community in the best possible way," said Joe Finkbonner, RPh, MHA, chair of PHAB's Board of Directors. "The accreditation process requires a commitment to quality and performance improvement. By achieving accreditation through PHAB, people living and working in Adams, Clay, Nuckolls and Webster Counties can rest assured that the South Heartland District Health Department is strong, has been rigorously examined, and has the capacity to protect and promote the health of everyone in the community."

###

About the South Heartland District Health Department (SHDHD)

The South Heartland District Health Department, nationally accredited by the Public Health Accreditation Board, works to protect, promote and improve the health of all people in Adams, Clay, Nuckolls and Webster Counties. Learn more about SHDHD at www.southheartlandhealth.org. For more information, please contact Michele Bever at michele.bever@shdhd.org or via phone at 402-462-6211.

About the Public Health Accreditation Board

The Public Health Accreditation Board (PHAB) was created to serve as the national public health accrediting body and is jointly funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. The development of national public health department accreditation has involved, and is supported by, public health leaders and practitioners from the national, state, local, Tribal, and territorial levels. For more information, contact PHAB Communications Manager Teddi Nicolaus at (703) 778-4549 ext. 118, or email tnicolaus@phaboard.org. Learn more about PHAB and accreditation at www.phaboard.org, and by [signing up](#) for the PHAB e-newsletter