



For **Immediate Release**
Date: **October 19, 2018**
Contact: Michele Bever, PhD, MPH, Executive Director
 402-462-6211 or toll free at 1-877-238-7595

* * * * *

Community Decides Priorities for Health Improvement

“Our communities have helped us identify five priorities to focus on for the next 6 years: Mental Health, Substance Abuse, Obesity and related health conditions, Cancer, and Access to Health Care,” according to South Heartland’s executive director, Michele Bever.

“After reviewing and discussing data from the most recent community health assessment, residents, stakeholders, community leaders and health professionals from Adams, Clay, Nuckolls and Webster counties, confirmed that these issues are important and need continued community focus if we are to improve health in the South Heartland Health District,” Bever said.

According to Bever, the top five 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.”

These decisions on health priorities come after more than 8 months of planning and gathering data and opinion through three types of assessments. 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>, and may provide comments through October 31st, 2018.

“The next step of the planning is to determine HOW we will try to improve on each health issue the community has identified as a priority,” Bever said. “Anyone interested in helping us determine strategies for improving Access to Health Care, can participate in the process on October 31st from 9:00 am to noon.” The meeting will be held at the health department (606 N. Minnesota Ave, Suite 2) or at remote locations in Clay, Nuckolls, and Webster counties. Register to participate by calling 402-462-6211.

Bever said there are also two meetings scheduled to set strategies for each of the other health priorities (Mental Health, Substance Abuse, Obesity and related health conditions, and Cancer) on November 14

and December 12. Interested individuals should contact the health department for the meeting schedule and to register to attend.

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.

##