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FUN FACT

Need inspiration for your new year's resolution?

One can of soda contains 10 teaspoons of sugar. The average U.S. adult drinks about 500 cans of soda every year, which means that person will consume 52 pounds of sugar from soda alone. Reduce this sugar intake by switching out a can of pop for some freshly squeezed lemonade, a glass of tea, or bottled water.

Lights in the darkness

A new year is supposed to be filled with hope for all the opportunities to come. Unfortunately, 2022 has already delivered some terrible blows for our team and public health in general.

We've lost a beloved colleague in Manda Clevenger and are facing the darkest time in this pandemic, with the current Omicron variant spreading like wildfire and overrunning our hospitals. Our testing sites are being inundated, and a national shortage of rapid tests forced us to pivot back to PCR tests with their longer turnaround times for results earlier this month. People across the state are frustrated. Our team is bone- and soul-crushingly weary.

We need to acknowledge that. It's OK to not be OK.

But as we recognize the dark times, it's also important to continue to seek out the bright spots. We see these every day in the work our team continues to do, not just on the COVID response, but on important efforts to prevent sexually transmitted diseases, help our babies live to their first birthdays, and give thousands of Afghan evacuees, nearly 40 percent of whom are children, a fresh start with an opportunity for better health.

The work of public health is more important than ever. In his 2022 State of the State address, Governor Holcomb thanked those who continue to put others above themselves to battle this pandemic. He hailed IDOH as the quarterback of those efforts and acknowledged that "no words, salary, or earthly awards will ever be enough to repay you for the lives you've cared for and saved."

I couldn't agree more. But I also am grateful that the state's compensation analysis will bring some well-deserved pay increases to staff at all levels this year. My hope is that this ongoing work will help us recruit people who have the same dedication and heart that all of you display.

Robert Frost once wrote of stopping in the woods to observe the snow and taking in the view on the "darkest evening of the year." This is our darkest evening, and like Frost's poem, we have promises to keep and miles to go before we sleep.

You all continue to keep the promises we've made to Hoosiers to give them the best opportunity for a healthy life. Thank you all for continuing to show up and giving so much of yourselves to help others. I believe 2022 is bound to get better. And we *will* sleep.

Yours in health,
Kris



**Kris Box
MD, FACOG**



LEARNING

Difficult conversations

There are many reasons why we may avoid having difficult conversations. The need to confront these types of issues and topics can seem overwhelming, but there is an organizational need to address certain issues that may not be easy to talk about directly with one or more people. This LinkedIn Learning course can help you understand how to identify the need for a difficult conversation, the stakeholders who should be included, and how to facilitate the conversation. Click [here](#) to watch the 52-minute presentation, and continue checking out LinkedIn Learning for more professional development opportunities.



**Indiana
Department
of
Health**

Mission:
*To promote, protect,
and improve the health
and safety of all
Hoosiers.*

Spotlight

IDOH combats syphilis outbreak with local, federal teams

It's long been acknowledged that diseases don't stop at borders.

Diseases don't care if public health teams happen to be dealing with another public health crisis, even a pandemic. The Indiana Department of Health's (IDOH) HIV/STD/Viral Hepatitis division knows that all too well as it marshals an all-hands-on-deck response to a syphilis outbreak in southwestern Indiana that showcases the heart of public health work.

To combat the outbreak, the team went door-to-door to homes, to bars and clubs, and even to the county jail to interview, test and treat those infected and exposed and to educate the public about the growing health crisis.

A resurgent public health enemy

Staff volunteers from IDOH, the Vanderburgh County Health Department, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and community-based organizations formed the response team, which gathered in Vanderburgh County and surrounding areas beginning in November. Syphilis is a sexually transmitted infection that, until recently, was relatively rare. The team's goal was to stem the tide of an increase in the number of confirmed syphilis cases, the resurgence of which could be related to several factors. The effects of syphilis can be severe, particularly in unborn children, however, so immediate action was necessary.

Syphilis, if left untreated, can lead to serious medical conditions, including brain and cardiovascular damage and other long-term effects. It can be cured with antibiotics but detecting it – at least in the early stages – can be difficult, and it can be spread easily. In fact, if there are no obvious physical symptoms – and sometimes there aren't – a person may not know they're infected, and that only increases the risk of spreading it to others. It can also be spread congenitally, from an infected pregnant person to the developing baby. Syphilis can cause severe effects and even death in infants.

The first cases associated with the outbreak began in June, and the outbreak threshold was reached by October. Compared to data from 2016 through 2020,



HIV/STD/Viral Hepatitis Director Jeremy Turner participates in the response to a syphilis outbreak.

the number of cases more than tripled in 2021. The need for help was obvious and the task wouldn't be easy, but the team was prepared to hit the ground running. **'Boots on the ground'**

Throughout the course of the first five-week response involving state health officials, the joint team tested close to a thousand people and spoke with hundreds more.

John Nichols, prevention director for the HIV/STD/Viral Hepatitis division, explained that the response focused on at-risk populations, such as people experiencing homelessness, people who use intravenous drugs or methamphetamine, people who use social media or the internet to meet sexual partners, people who exchange money or drugs for sex, and people who have been incarcerated within the last year.

"We visited homeless shelters, social service agencies and healthcare agencies for this priority population," Nichols explained.

At the mission's core was a person-first approach that aimed to prevent at least as many future cases as cases detected and treated. To that end, the crew

went directly to the communities involved in the outbreak.

"During the course of the first week and the lead-up to the testing initiatives, we knocked on 2,700 doors," Nichols said. "If there was no answer, we left a doorhanger with info and materials about our presence in the county, what we're doing, and what to look for."

Those visits sparked more than 500 conversations, with some people agreeing to be tested then and there, on their front porch. The team also tested 348 residents at the Vanderburgh County Jail in a single day. There was a breakfast testing event and nighttime testing events at local bars and clubs.

The reception was as positive as the methods were, at least outwardly, unconventional.

"We had all different types of good responses," Nichols said.

Credit for that may have come from a meticulous approach to planning and sharing the news that the team was in the affected region to do everything it could to help.

To promote local outreach and assistance, the team used social media, geofencing, advertisements, and door hanger materials – thousands of which were assembled by IDOH staff.

Thanks to the presence of phlebotomists, the team was able to perform rapid tests as well as blood tests to get results quickly. Positive cases were contact traced so that others who may have been exposed to the infection could be notified and tested and treated if necessary.

Second effort

The team returned to the Vanderburgh County area in January with the intention of re-testing some people who may be infected but whose status could not be confirmed by an earlier test.

"It's important to re-test people who may have been negative at the first testing event to see if the infection has developed to where it is now detectable by a test," Nichols said.

The team has worked to increase its collaborative opportunities during this

Continued on next page

'Outbreak response' (continued)

round and is already planning more ways to continue improving the response. This includes ramping up advertising, continuing training and education efforts for disease intervention specialists, and further engaging health care providers. Additional outreach for local businesses and students is on the agenda as well.

As of Jan. 18, 85 cases have been identified in the outbreak. At least 70 of individuals have received treatment as part of the response.

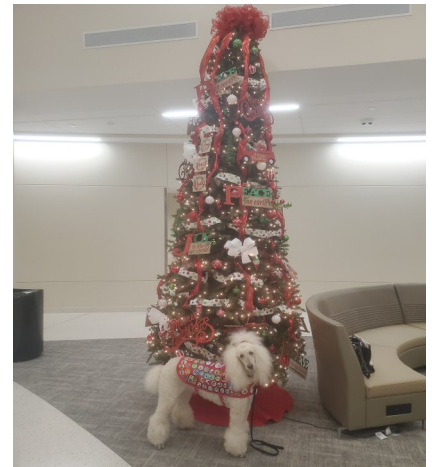
"This response has been a great collaboration between IDOH, VCHD, and the CDC," Nichols said. "Our return in January has provided an opportunity to complete testing and treatment for this region."

Deputy State Health Commissioner and State Epidemiologist Pam Pontones wished to recognize the IDOH employees involved the effort. In addition to Nichols, they included HIV/STD/Viral Hepatitis division director Jeremy Turner, Joshua Dowell, Daniel Hillman, Deborah Nichols, Jamie Black, Ariel Cheatham, Jeremy Davis, Erika Chapman, Kyra Kofodimos, Colin M. Stretch, Jena Rasor, Kyle D. Smith, Marvinna Jones, Andrew Templon, Libby Harrison, Dandy Garcia, Dawne Diorio, Justin Holderman, Joel M. Bazzel, Brandon Halleck, Larry Stribling Jr., Calvin Knight-Nellis, Steven Verhey, Steven Caruth, Shere Brooks, Melissa Meador and Gurpreet Dhillon.

"This is truly public health in its most traditional sense – a boots-on-the-ground effort to stop an outbreak by investigating, educating, testing and treating," Pontones said. "Due to the incredible effort by IDOH, VCHD and CDC, the number of new cases has plummeted. People are aware of the risk and prevention of syphilis infection, and healthcare providers are informed about testing and treatment. We will use what we've learned from this effort to strengthen our surveillance and inform future responses. I could not be prouder of this amazing team."

Share your story!

Do you have a story to share for an upcoming edition of Pulse? Tell us! Contact Brent Brown at brent.brown@isdh.in.gov to share your story ideas and photos.



Robyn Porter's dog Hallie prepares to greet grocery store customers while volunteering for the Salvation Army, above left. At right, Hallie provides pet therapy at Community Hospital during the holidays.

A higher standard ... poodle OTC's Porter, Hallie raise money to benefit Salvation Army

Indiana Department of Health Office of Technology and Compliance project manager Robyn Porter and her standard poodle, Hallie, raised \$785.98 for the Salvation Army this holiday season.

During her visit, Hallie wore her Dog Scout vest adorned with merit badges. As a therapy dog, Hallie knows how to approach people to meet and greet. The fact that she's lovable and super cute probably helped her raise a "doggone" impressive amount of money for the charity.

Although pet therapy opportunities were reduced in 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, in December Porter and Hallie were invited to Community Hospital to provide pet therapy at a wellness event for hospital staff.

January staffing updates

Please welcome the following new employees to the Indiana Department of Health:

- Catherine Shultz—Home and Community-Based Care
- Michelle Grimard—Epidemiology Resource Center
- Makayla Culbertson—Epidemiology Resource Center
- Crystal Cliborne—Acute Care
- Sharan Douglas—Acute Care
- Karen Brown—Vital Records
- Terri Honeck—Long-Term Care
- Kaelan Spohn—Long-Term Care
- Trinity Edinburgh—Maternal and Child Health
- Cheryl Whitfield—Environmental Public Health
- Jazmyne Carter—Laboratories
- Chloe Reneau—Emergency Preparedness
- Eric Williams—Long-Term Care
- Laura Doggett—Maternal and Child Health
- Jennifer Reed—Acute Care
- Mia Smith—Acute Care
- Lucas Meredith—Emergency Preparedness

Lemieux wins Holiday Wellness Challenge drawing; contest continues helping employees meet wellness goals

Though her French-Canadian surname, quite literally, translates to “the best,” Charlotte Lemieux is likely about as modest as a person comes.

The HIV/STD/Viral Hepatitis division’s Contracts and Rebates manager didn’t enter the Health and Wellness Council’s annual Holiday Wellness Challenge with her mind set on winning; rather, she wanted to stay afloat on a current health initiative: keeping herself hydrated.

“I did [the water intake challenge] because I know hydration is an important part of good health and that was the specific focus I chose,” Lemieux explained.

She said discussions with her health coach have centered on drinking more water, so the contest was another way she could work on that goal.

“The challenge did what it was supposed to: It kept me mindful during the hectic end-of-year-season to just make sure I was getting my water intake,” said Lemieux.

For eight consecutive holiday seasons, the contest has helped IDOH staffers stay similarly aware of their health goals during a time when indulgence is almost as much of a tradition as the holidays themselves. So the timing is right to encourage any number of healthy activities – from exercise routines to eating better.

“Participants report this challenge is a great way to help keep them mindful of and on track with their chosen focus areas of wellness throughout the holiday season,” said Sara Caudell, a public health nurse surveyor who headed-up the eighth annual contest.

Caudell said people who participate document their progress, and that helps each person stay accountable.

“Then, the hope is that this challenge has guided each participant to establish good routines they can maintain as they start the new year,” she added.

It’s working for Lemieux, who is staying on track with her goal of drinking the recommended amount of water each day. She credits the contest with helping her stay the course.

“It was a good way to be mindful of just one healthy thing I was able to focus on and achieve,” she said. “I would not have been focused on this activity if we had not had the challenge.”

Lemieux complimented Caudell for her work organizing the contest, which saw about three dozen total participants. Lemieux and nine other employees were the only employees who completed all five weeks of the challenge.

“I wanted to give a shout-out to the organizers and Sara Caudell for overseeing the challenge for us,” Lemieux said. “Things like the holiday challenge take time out of our busy work lives to organize and oversee, so thanks, Sara!”

Lemieux joined IDOH in July 2021, but she’s been a state employee for more than 25 years. She said she saw the contest as way to get involved and “to help facilitate a sense of fellowship with other IDOH employees,” adding that doing so can help enhance a person’s sense of belonging as they come to know new work colleagues.

By winning the contest drawing, Lemieux was allowed to choose the beneficiary of the challenge’s proceeds. She picked



Charlotte Lemieux (right) donated proceeds from the Holiday Wellness Challenge to Indiana Pagan Community Outreach and Dialogue (IPCOD). Pictured at left is IPCOD treasurer Vanessa Mize.

Indiana Pagan Community Outreach and Dialogue.

Caudell noted that participation numbers have slipped for the contest in the last two holiday seasons, possibly due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The challenge averages about 50 employees each year otherwise, she said.

Lemieux says the annual challenge is a good way to stay motivated about achieving a health goal, adding that there is no judgment, and each participant can find within themselves the drive to accomplish whatever they’ve set out to do.

“It’s more a self-challenge than a competition with fellow employees,” said Lemieux. “Most of us are harder on ourselves than we would be on someone else. Meeting our own personal goals gives a sense of satisfaction, even if you aren’t able to successfully meet your goal on one or two of the days. The knowledge that we know what to do to be more healthful and are taking actions toward that end can also give a sense of satisfaction,” she said.

In the end, Lemieux believes making the effort is far better than not trying at all, even if the daily results aren’t always “the best.”

It’s a hope that gels with the Wellness Council’s mission as it prepares for another contest each holiday season.

“The council hopes to bring wellness awareness to as many employees as possible throughout IDOH by employee participation across all commissions, divisions, and locations,” said Caudell.

If you’re interested in joining or learning more about the Wellness Council, contact Division of Nutrition and Physical Activity director Lindsey Bouza at LBouza@isdh.in.gov or Julia Brunnemer at jbrunnemer@isdh.IN.gov.

How to keep your New Year's resolutions going all year

Every year, Hoosiers make New Year's resolutions.

Losing weight, eating healthy, getting fit and quitting tobacco all make the top of the list. But by the end of January, the majority of those goals have been abandoned, leaving many feeling discouraged and disappointed in themselves.

It doesn't have to be this way! Sometimes healthy resolutions can be unrealistic or too broad to actually accomplish, so think of several small, more achievable goals that will eventually lead to your ultimate goal — living a healthier life.

The first step to success with your New Year's resolutions? Don't think of them as just "New Year" resolutions; view these goals as healthy lifestyle changes you are committed to working toward throughout the year. Your health is worth it.

Move more throughout the day. This doesn't have to involve hitting the gym for 45 minutes every day, although that can certainly help. This can be as simple as walking up the escalator or taking the

stairs. Park farther away in parking lots. Go for a stroll around the office once an hour. Get outside for 10 minutes a day. Stretch while watching TV. The little things will all add up. Do squats while brushing your teeth — make use of those two minutes!

Be more thoughtful about what you eat and drink. Drink a glass of water when you wake up in the morning. Take your coffee or tea without sweetener. Focus on chewing all the food in your mouth before taking another bite and savor the taste. Ditch soda for a day, or a week. Take healthy snacks to work — a homemade trail mix is easy and requires no cooking. Make a list for the grocery store and stick to it. You'll save money and ignore any last minute cravings.

Take care of yourself. Feel stress coming on? Focus on your breathing. Stay off of social media for 24 hours to see how it feels not being "connected." Read a book — it's good for your mind. Plan a vacation — little or big. Taking a break from the "norm" will make you feel replenished and

rejuvenated. Give yourself an at-home spa day — a bath can help you relax and wind down after a long day. Spend more time with family and friends — pick up the phone and call a friend you haven't talked with in a while.

Sleep more. This one is always hard, but try these simple tips to be more restful. Turn off all electronics 20 minutes before you go to bed. Put the alarm where you're forced to get up to turn it off. You'll be less likely to hit the snooze button. Speaking of the snooze button, resist the urge to use it. That eight extra minutes of sleep may seem really appealing, but it disrupts your circadian rhythm and can make you more tired during the day.

Sticking to resolutions can be hard, but remember to be patient. It can take time to make a complete lifestyle change. It's okay to slip-up sometimes — just work to get back on track before you lose your motivation. With all this in mind, you can make 2022 your happiest and healthiest year yet.

What will you do in 2022? Jooda creates haircare product, Mistry hits soccer field to achieve health goals



Mosunmola Jooda

The promise of a new year comes in any number of forms.

For Mosunmola Jooda and Alpa Mistry, however, the next 12 months look to be exciting in some unique ways.

Jooda, a data quality analyst for the Indiana Department of Health's Vital Records division,

said she has several resolutions she plans to tackle in 2022, but she hopes to spend much of the first half of the year sharing a special kind of "magic."

Jooda said her new haircare product, "MoeMagicDrops," got its start in 2020 when she decided to try a new hairstyle.

"I went ahead to chop off my hair and needed something to help grow my hair and edges," she said.

While looking for that solution, MoeMagicDrops was born.

Jooda said the mixture of hair oils earned rave reviews from her friends and family and now she hopes to offer it for sale globally.

"I'm super excited in sharing this vision



not just here in the U.S., but also in Nigeria," she said.

Jooda said she took some samples to Nigeria with her last summer, and the reception was just as positive.

"This has given me the enthusiasm to continue," she explained.

Mistry, director of the Vital Records division, also found motivation and support from loved ones as she prepared to kick off the new year.

"I have always been doing some sort of exercise for the last 10 years, but since June 2021, my husband persuaded me to play women's soccer for the first time in my life, since both our girls are playing for a travel soccer league," Mistry ex-

plained.

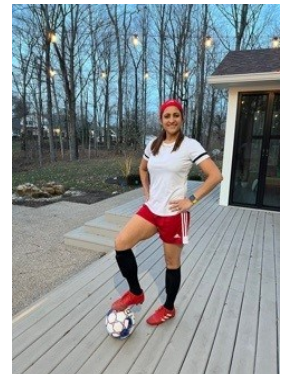
She said she's scored a few goals already, but in her efforts to improve her game, she plans to start soccer lessons. Mistry believes this will help her become a better player.

"I feel super proud to learn a new sport at my age and pursue it as a form of exercise to keep myself fit," she said.

She said she has a few diet goals planned for this year as well, including attempting to be gluten free. She said she began a vegan diet last year.

Whether you're working on a longtime dream or trying out a new activity, we hope your 2022 is filled with good health, happiness, and success.

Do you want to share your story? Contact Brent Brown, our internal communications specialist, at brebrown@isdh.in.gov.



Alpa Mistry



DARTT team targets 2022 tech transformations

The new year is an exciting time for the DARTT team as we reflect on the progress made in 2021 and direct our attention to transforming the agency's data, analytics, reporting and technology in 2022.

Substantial discovery work and assessments were completed last year as the team documented the current state of the Indiana Department of Health's data and technology. This discovery work relied on the candid and thoughtful input of employees across the agency. Responses from IDOH employees to surveys, meetings, interviews, focus groups and the [suggestion box](#), have supplied a valuable, foundational understanding of the data and technology issues and needs of the entire Agency. Similarly, we are thankful for the engagement and support of DARTT's initiatives that are already underway.

A key outcome of the discovery work is the ongoing development of a comprehensive data and technology "roadmap" that defines where the agency is currently, what improvements need to be made, and how IDOH will get there. As a result, several important initiatives will be underway in 2022. These include:

- STARLIMS Advanced Analytics is an additional module of the IT system used by IDOH laboratories to help make data-driven decisions
- Prioritized upgrades to IDOH systems, based on assessments from system owners relating to system health (including user functionality)
- Implementing a new cloud analytics data environment to improve the efficiency and reliability of data analysis
- A phased rollout of IT & data governance in collaboration

with program areas

- Continuing efforts with the program areas to capture and document our data through our Enterprise Data Catalog (EDC) project
- A "recharge" of the Data Release Committee with accompanying guidance for requesting, reviewing and sharing data
- Application security software to aid the application development process by identifying potentially harmful security vulnerabilities
- Transition of agency SFTP file transfer processes to a new IOT offered platform, GoAnywhere
- A dedicated DARTT intranet site to share further details about individual initiatives, who is involved in DARTT, and how to get involved

Future articles in PULSE will share more detail about these initiatives and more information on the DARTT project. We recognize that feedback is a continual process and while the main phases of discovery have been completed, we continue to value new thoughts, suggestions, and ideas.

We look forward to embarking on the next stage of DARTT and helping IDOH achieve its goal of improving the health of all Hoosiers.

Do you have thoughts on DARTT? Share them with the [suggestion eBox](#) or reach out directly to the team by contacting Bob Davis at rodavis@isdh.in.gov and/or Mohan Ambaty at mambaty@isdh.in.gov.

Spot bonus program recognizes exceptional work efforts

The Spot Bonus program is a great way to recognize exceptional work efforts.

Employees who demonstrate exemplary service that results in a tangible and measurable cost savings or achievement for the Indiana Department of Health may be nominated for a Spot Bonus Recognition Award. Formal nominations via the Recognition Request Form must be submitted by a supervisor or manager in the employee's chain of command.



A spot bonus is a one-time lump sum payment paid on an employee's paycheck (subject to taxes and other deductions) following approval. An employee may receive up to three spot bonuses per calendar year. IDOH is approved to spend \$81,800 per fiscal year on this! This does NOT come out of a program budget.

To date, IDOH employees have been awarded \$24,600! More information and the application can be found [here](#).



Laura Parks

GUESS WHO I MET ON THE ELEVATOR?



Title: Staff attorney, Office of Legal Affairs

Brief Job Description: I work as an advisory attorney for OLA. The majority of my work consists of assisting with rulemaking, responding to legal questions, performing legal research, and reviewing contracts/MOUs/grants.

Time at IDOH: I have been at IDOH for only a few months, as my first day was Sept. 7, 2021.

What do you like most about working at IDOH? I have been very impressed by the welcoming environment and wonderful people I have met in the short amount of time I have worked at IDOH. Additionally, I enjoy working on projects that have a real impact on public health, especially in light of the pandemic.

Optum EAP support is now available

Optum is now the Employee Assistance Program provider for State of Indiana employees.

You will still have access to the same great EAP benefits for you and your family. You can connect with an Optum EAP consultant for online support at liveandworkwell.com (access code: Indiana), or by phone at 800-886-9747.

Optum EAP is a free, confidential service to help you and your family navigate life's challenges. Any member of your household, including children living away from home, can access the interactive

website or contact a consultant.

Optum's team of experienced consultants is available by phone or online 24/7 to provide help with a range of life concerns and stressors, including:

- Relationship problems
- Workplace conflicts and changes
- Parenting and family issues
- Stress, anxiety, and depression
- Elder care support
- Legal and financial concerns

Learn more [here](#).



Create a 'quit plan' to be tobacco-free in 2022

If you're a tobacco user, the best thing you can do in 2022 is make a quit plan.

A **quit plan** can improve your chances of quitting tobacco for good by combining quit-smoking strategies to keep you motivated to quit, helping identify challenges you might face, and finding ways to overcome them.

Tips for success:

- Make the decision – Set a quit date and stick to it. Think about your reasons and motivations for quitting.
- Build a support system – Tell your family, friends and co-workers that you plan to quit.
- Get the professional help you need to succeed.
- Ask for medication and use it correctly – Talk with your health care provider about nicotine replacement therapy or other options.
- Learn new behaviors and skills – Change your daily routine and remove triggers for using tobacco.
- Be prepared to fight – Relapse or difficult times may occur, but don't let small mistakes discourage you or make you give up altogether.

Visit QuitNowIndiana.com, or call 1-800-Quit Now, to get started.



While you were out ...

Are you planning to be out of the office for several days? The last thing you want to think about is work. There are some easy steps you can take to make sure you can enjoy your time away while ensuring that processes continue uninterrupted in your absence.

Two separate systems will require your attention before you leave for more than a few days: PeopleSoft Financial and PeopleSoft HR. Both systems have similar steps you'll need to take, but you can complete both in a matter of minutes.

We'll check out PeopleSoft Financial first.

Head to in.gov for state employees and select PeopleSoft Financial in the "Account Management" box. Once you're logged in, go to the icon in the top-right of the page and click "Navigator," then scroll all the way down and click on "My System Profile." Pick the "Alternate User" section and enter the user ID of the person taking over for you while you're gone, along with the dates this will be in effect. Head to the bottom of the page, click "save," and you're all done.

PeopleSoft HR is even easier! Get there from the state employees' in.gov site by clicking on PeopleSoft HR in the "Account Management" box, then click "Main Menu" and go to "My System Profile." Follow the same steps as outlined above and you're all set!

Now is also a great time to review who the approvers are for your departments/divisions. The Office of Finance recommends having at least two approvers in PeopleSoft Financial per division. Some divisions have two staff and their assistant commissioner to ensure that approvals will not be held up.

If you have questions, email Chief Financial Officer Adam Novotney at anovotney1@isdh.in.gov.

A winning team: Burkert, Viehweg building bridges between IDOH, legislature

Though they took decidedly different paths to get here, Micha Burkert and Blaire Viehweg make a great team.

With their shared love of public service and commitment to public health guiding them, they're working to build positive relationships with Hoosier lawmakers that will, in turn, help forge policies that are beneficial to Indiana residents.

"It's about relationship building," said Viehweg, who joined IDOH in November 2021, soon after finishing an accelerated master's degree program through her alma mater, IUPUI. "It's building bridges."

Burkert, a Winamac native who graduated from Indiana University before earning her law degree from the IU Robert H. McKinney School of Law, took on the role of Indiana Department of Health director of Legislative and External Affairs last fall. With Viehweg working as deputy director, the two are the link between what happens within the Indiana General Assembly and with how those new laws related to public health will impact the divisions of IDOH. That, of course, will trickle on to Hoosiers at large, so establishing a rapport is vital in their work.

Luckily, both know a thing or two about teamwork.

Burkert ran cross-country and track in high school, but it was her experience as a legislative intern that helped firmly establish her career path. She said she'd always been interested in the



Legislative and External Affairs director Micha Burkert (right) and deputy director Blaire Viehweg

legislative process, so seeing it firsthand in that role, interacting with the Senate Health and Provider Services Committee chairperson, only affirmed what she already knew: This was definitely the career for her.

What she didn't immediately know was the scope of IDOH's work.

"I didn't realize how much the health department touches," Burkert said. She expressed admiration for the dedication of IDOH employees whose work impacts Hoosiers in myriad positive ways.

Burkert hasn't stopped running, either, as she's parlayed her track experience into half-marathons since her high school days.

Viehweg was a standout soccer player at Mt. Vernon High School, but perhaps her proudest moments came from

a different kind of football. Viehweg was the placekicker for the Marauders' varsity football squad, and she once drilled a 42-yard field goal.

"I won homecoming queen in full football pads," she said with a laugh.

She went on to be a Borst Fellow en route to IDOH.


Burkert and Viehweg are also proud dog owners. Burkert's precocious Chihuahua-terrier Bella is her favorite furry friend, while Viehweg adores her 104-pound Bernese mountain dog, Maverick.

Shield Spotlight shines on Trauma's Sprecher


Morgan Sprecher of the Division of Trauma and Injury Prevention is this month's Shield Spotlight award nominee.

Morgan was nominated by Cassidy McNamee, the division's former Naloxone program manager, who complimented Sprecher on her work on the division's suicide data analysis program.

"Morgan has dedicated countless hours to improving our suicide data analysis program," said McNamee. "She created a



SHIELD SPOTLIGHT
JANUARY 2022



Morgan Sprecher, MPH
Indiana Violent Death Reporting System (INVDRS) Epidemiologist
Division of Trauma and Injury Prevention

I am humbled by this award as I think everyone on my team is equally deserving. It's true what they say: love what you do and you'll never work a day in your life.

great resource connecting COVID-19 and mental health. Her dedication to her work is unparalleled."

McNamee nominated Morgan for the Award of Excellence.

Let your light shine!

Do you know someone like Morgan who deserves special recognition? Head to the [Shield Spotlight form](#) and nominate someone today! You can nominate an individual or a team for any of the following honors: Award of Excellence, Team Player Award, Personal Achievement Award, Customer Service Award, or a Workplace Milestone.