

Nebraska State and Legislative Actions:

SAMHSA Grant

A second grant from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, or SAMHSA, has been awarded to the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The \$2 million grant will go toward expanding access to outpatient services, psychotherapy, and peer support for those who experience serious mental illness, substance use disorders, or both. The expanded capacity will also be available to individuals with less severe mental health illnesses, including those in the healthcare profession.

From the [press release](#): “Reaching individuals in the healthcare professions will require a different approach than has typically been employed by the Department of Behavioral Health, or DBH. DBH is proposing to build on the existing communication channels utilized by various professional and medical associations to communicate the availability of the behavioral health services to their members.

Service funds are proposed to be incorporated into contracts and subawards with Regional Behavioral Health Authorities, tribal authorities, peer-run organizations and medical and social service organizations for healthcare providers, first responders and other essential personnel to provide access to services and supports that cannot be met with other resources such as private insurance, employee assistance programs or Medicaid. The DBH is also proposing to expand the contracts for capacity with peer run organizations in the state to increase access to family navigator, family peer support, and peer support services to provide recovery support services, individual support services and referrals for resource assistance for childcare, vocational, educational, linkages to housing services, and transportation services; services which will improve access to, and retention in services.”

Governor Update

Gov. Ricketts began his daily press briefing by announcing two new testing sites would be set up in Omaha and Grand Island through the [testnebraska.com](#) program. Ricketts then spoke on restaurants and other businesses reopening, under certain guidelines in certain areas of the state like Omaha. Dining rooms will be able to operate at 50% of capacity, with staff wearing masks and tables six feet apart. Dental and veterinarian offices will be allowed to reopen statewide, and elective surgeries can begin again if criteria is met within the hospital or surgical facility.

Q&A

Q: Why did Smithfield in Crete change its mind and decide to stay open after announcing it was closing?

A: Ricketts said that on Monday morning Smithfield call his office and said they would be closing. Then they called back later in the afternoon and said they had changed their minds and decided to operate at limited capacity. Ricketts said that they are expanding testing in Crete and have also deployed contact tracing teams as well.

Q: Some Nebraska Senators have said your decision to relax guidelines is [political and not medical](#). What is your response to that?

A: Ricketts said he would encourage the senator to look at the hospital data, which shows we are not anywhere near to overwhelming our hospital capabilities.

Q: Can we expect more guidelines to be relaxed soon?

A: Ricketts said he will take things one step at a time, but that social distancing will likely last into the fall and maybe even the end of the year. He said to expect some restrictions regarding county fairs, sporting events, and other activities throughout the year.

Federal:

Testing

On Monday, the White House released guidance regarding coronavirus testing. The guidance included recommendations for states on how to develop and implement their own testing plans. Some measures included are expanding the number of testing platforms, increasing testing and laboratory supplies, unlocking full laboratory capacity, and enhancing sample collection. To read the full guidance, [click here](#).

Congress

The House of Representatives will not be returning to Washington D.C. next week, after previously having plans to meet on May 4. According to House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer, the attending physician in Congress advised against members meeting on Monday. However, the Senate will still meet on Monday as planned—though it is unclear if any COVID-19 related legislation will be discussed or considered. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell said that while the Senate will be meeting amid a pandemic, safety guidelines will be followed. ¹

"We will modify routines in ways that are smart and safe, but we will honor our constitutional duty to the American people and conduct critical business in person," McConnell said. "If it is essential for doctors, nurses, healthcare workers, truck drivers, grocery-store workers, and many other brave Americans to keep carefully manning their own duty stations, then it is essential for Senators to carefully man ours and support them."

¹ <https://www.npr.org/2020/04/28/847411554/house-cancels-plans-to-return-to-washington-on-may-4-senate-preps-plans-for-sess>