



# ANNUAL REPORT 2023



**Southwest Nebraska  
Public Health Department**

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PREVENT • PROMOTE • PROTECT

# Accreditation

SWNPHD started the accreditation process in early 2022, taking the steps to gain the designation from the national Public Health Accreditation Board (PHAB). This process takes dedication and effort by all staff members - gathering documentation, updating policies and procedures, and putting together narratives about our accomplishments, collaborations, and activities, all working towards a healthier southwest Nebraska. Becoming accredited shows a high level of performance standards, as well as advocating for performance improvement and strengthening public health infrastructure.

A Readiness Assessment was completed with PHAB in June, which will assist SWNPHD moving forward with the application in October of 2023. This allowed the Accreditation Coordinator and staff to adjust their submissions and continue to fine-tune policies and procedures to better fit the PHAB requirements.

In addition to these activities, staff worked to complete other requirements needed for both accreditation and general work within the health department. A Community Health Assessment (CHA) was completed with partner agencies, which subsequently launched work on the Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP).

## Board of Health

### Chase County:

Jacci Brown

Larry Carpenter

### Dundy County:

Scott Olson

Rita Jones

### Frontier County:

Kevin Owens

Erin Pascoe

### Furnas County:

Mike Sexton

John Kutnink

### Hayes County:

Jeffrey Unger

Leon Kolbet

### Hitchcock County:

Scott McDonald

Kerri Miller

### Keith County:

Joan Ervin

Brian Wilson

### Perkins County:

Mark Bottom

Laurie Walrod

### Red Willow County:

Ted Gans

Terri Skolout

### Physician:

Shiuvaun Jaeger, MD

### Dentist:

Scott Tobias, DDS

# PREVENT

## Illness, Disease, Injury and Death



## Lead Poisoning Prevention

In the past two years the CDC has changed the guidelines for what is considered a positive case of lead poisoning. This new level is 3.5 ug/dl, down from 5ug/dl. With this new change more children have been diagnosed with lead poisoning. The health department works with providers, families and the Department of Health and Human Services to help decrease the risk for further exposure to these children. Educational materials, notifications for retesting and if needed a free lead inspection of the home with the assistance of DHHS are offered. Working with our providers has helped to bring awareness to the new lead level criteria and has helped children and families have safer and healthier home environments.

## Water Lead Testing

During the 2022-2023 year, SWNPHD continued to partner with NDEE/DHHS to provide free lead sampling of drinking water for public childcare facilities, preschools, and elementary schools around the health district. Should the need arise, SWNPHD will work with any facility that finds lead in their drinking water to identify corrective actions to address the source of the contamination.

SWNPHD contacted and offered free water-lead testing to 57 childcare facilities and 10 schools in our health district. That resulted in an additional 2 schools accepting the offer and completing the testing. Since the program started, over 20 facilities have participated. The results of the testing can be found at [dhhs.ne.gov/pages/Lead-Data.aspx](https://dhhs.ne.gov/pages/Lead-Data.aspx).



## Radon Awareness

Radon gas is the second leading cause of lung cancer, and about half of all homes in Nebraska have radon. SWNPHD's radon program spreads awareness of the hazards of radon and provides education on how to lower radon levels in buildings and homes. We share information through many different formats to reach a wide audience, and work with partners like realtors, building inspectors, and extension offices. In 2023 we participated in a learning group with area hospitals to increase lung cancer screenings and gather data on radon and lung cancer. Currently radon exposure is not a qualifying factor for lung cancer screening.

## Radon Poster Contest

Tara Sudbeck & Keith County  
Winners Lucy Schlake, Jessa  
Hughes, and Eva Draucker

Five local schools participated in the Radon Poster Contest, with over 200 entries received in November 2022. Their posters shared the hazards of radon and encouraged testing in creative and often humorous ways, and many students reported getting their homes tested for radon after participating in the contest. Winners were selected in 3 age groups and received certificates and cash prizes.



# Health Hub & Target Your Health

Health Hub is a collaborative program working with community-level partners and DHHS to assess the needs of the community and priority populations around preventive screening with emphasis on breast, cervical, and colon cancer, cardiovascular risk reduction, and obesity. Through community partnership and engagement, SWNPHD helps to develop pathways to care with the implementation of evidence-based interventions.

Outcomes are meant to improve access to high-quality preventive screening services, enhance community linkages and strengthen data collection and utilization that impact the quality of life and health outcomes for Nebraska residents.

Health Hub and Target Your Health were created to provide people with health screenings that include blood pressure checks, cholesterol, and glucose checks, as well as weight and BMI measurements. The Health Hub program also helps women aged 40-64 and men 50-74 to get their cancer screenings completed.

Moving forward post-pandemic, HUB/TYH will reach out to local communities to provide health screenings and offer educational opportunities that promote preventive services. Women who qualify also receive free health coaching to assist them in reaching their weight, fitness, and nutrition goals. Making lifestyle changes can help control conditions such as high blood pressure and elevated cholesterol and improves overall fitness.

Health Hub staff are currently collaborating with local businesses to increase the number of men and women receiving preventive cancer screenings.

# TARGET YOUR HEALTH

## Colon Cancer Screening

SWNPHD continues to provide FREE home screening kits for colon cancer through a grant from the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services. In the last year, 37 kits were handed out. The test kits are for anyone ages 45-74 and may be picked up at the McCook and Ogallala offices. Follow the enclosed directions and return in the enclosed envelope. Your test results will be mailed back to you.

## Pool Cool

The Pool Cool Program works with local swimming pools to provide education about sun safety during their swim lessons. Ten pools in the district agreed to teach the Pool Cool lessons. Each pool that participated in the program was given a gallon of sunscreen, educational posters and all materials needed to teach the 8 safety lessons. Pools were asked to provide pictures of the lessons being taught. After completion of the program area pools were awarded \$250.00



Pool Cool Program Manager Sarah Minnick and Cambridge Swimming Pool lifeguards

# Minority Health Initiative

Minority Health Initiative (MHI) is a program that helps improve the health of vulnerable populations of racial and/or ethnic minority groups collaborating with local hospitals and medical clinics to provide health screenings and patient health education.

Health Screenings were held in Chase and Hayes counties to offer free lab screenings and blood pressure checks to the minority community along with Covid-19 vaccines and other immunizations.

64 men and women were screened for cholesterol and blood pressure at the three locations. All clients received health education on their lab values; those with high and critical values were encouraged to follow up with their medical provider. One location was on-site at a large feedlot; most of these workers are not able to seek medical care due to their long work hours.

Vaccine Clinics were also offered in Dundy and Hayes Counties. 33 Covid-19 vaccines were administered to minority families (men, women, and children). We provide COVID information and numerous other resources in Spanish on our website and at our community events.

**Alicia from Chase County Clinic said, "Your agency really did the community a great service."**



**"Estoy muy agradecido y bendecido por estos servicios!" "I am very grateful and blessed for these services!"** said one minority patient.  
**"Gracias por todo!" "Thank you for everything!"**

## N-95 Fit Testing

The COVID-19 pandemic made it clear how important it is to take care of our healthcare workers. This program focused on staff at Long Term Care facilities (LTCF). It is the goal of this program that 90% of staff working in LTCF be fit tested so they are wearing the proper N-95 mask if the need arises. SWNPHD sent 2 staff members to a day-long train-the-trainer program to learn how to do the FIT testing for N-95 masks. A survey was sent out to all the LTCFs in our district asking if they would like to participate in the training. Most of the LTCF's in our district have their staff FIT tested at the local hospital; however, we are prepared to provide supplies and training to any facility should the need arise.

## Overdose Data to Action

The introduction of synthetic opioids, such as fentanyl, in the illegal drug supply has heightened the risk of overdose and death even among first time users. The Overdose Data to Action (OD2A) program united key leaders in the community to address the dangers of substance use. Through this grant SWNPHD supported a project which provided addiction-focused mindfulness therapy to inmates in the correctional system. Partnerships with the Opioid Response Network, Valley Hope of Norton (addiction treatment center), McCook Community Hospital, and others led to the implementation of substance use trainings for healthcare staff in local hospitals and the planning of a regional overdose conference. SWNPHD promoted the sharing of overdose data and news through social media, data reports, and a substance use community assessment survey conducted among community leaders. To find these reports and get more details about OD2A visit our website: <https://www.swhealth.ne.gov/healthylifestyle/overdose>.

## West Nile Virus Surveillance

Each year SWNPHD works with DHHS's arboviral program to help collect and test for WNV in the health district. Every other week a contracted mosquito trapper sets traps in the area to collect mosquitoes to be sent in for testing. Although no positive mosquitoes were found in the 2022 season, we know WNV is still out there. Each year people in the state of Nebraska become ill with this virus. When a positive case of WNV is identified in a person, horse or at a trap sight press releases, social media and radio interviews are conducted to help notify our people throughout the health district.

# PROMOTE

## Wellness

### Polish Your Pearls



Southwest Nebraska  
Public Health Department

## Polish Your Pearls

Polish Your Pearls is a grant-based dental program implemented by Southwest Nebraska Public Health Department (SWNPHD) that helps supplement regular dental visits to provide optimal protection against cavities for children. This program is available to local daycares and schools to provide oral health screening, dental education, and application of fluoride varnish. Polish Your Pearls has provided dental services in 8 of the 9 counties in the district. **Polish Your Pearls has seen over 400 children this year and applied over 300 fluoride varnish treatments.** With no Medicaid dental providers in the district, it has been very challenging for many children to be seen or even treated by a dentist. After one visit to a school, Polish Your Pearls was able to review the dental work needed by one child and found a local dentist who agreed to see the child and fixed several cavities. In another case, Polish Your Pearls was able to help a child get an appointment with a pediatric specialist who had to do surgery, but all teeth are now fixed. These actions have made a real impact in the lives of two children.



SWNPHD has a new dental board member, Dr. Scott Tobias. SWNPHD has been working with local agencies to help provide oral health care to children by organizing a group of partners to discuss different options and opportunities. These projects will include more planning with partners, providing more education and basic dental care to children, securing transportation to specialty dentists, and increasing preventive services within the school system.

## Walk To Health

Walk to Health is a free walking program to encourage people to better their health by increasing their physical activity. This year 4 different challenges were done. This year's 12-week team walking challenge had 229 participants. Thanks to Community Hospital participants can track their steps through an app called MoveSpring. Prizes were given to the team with the highest daily average and the individual with the most steps.

2023 Winners Bret Hagan and Jackie Juhl



## Kids Fitness

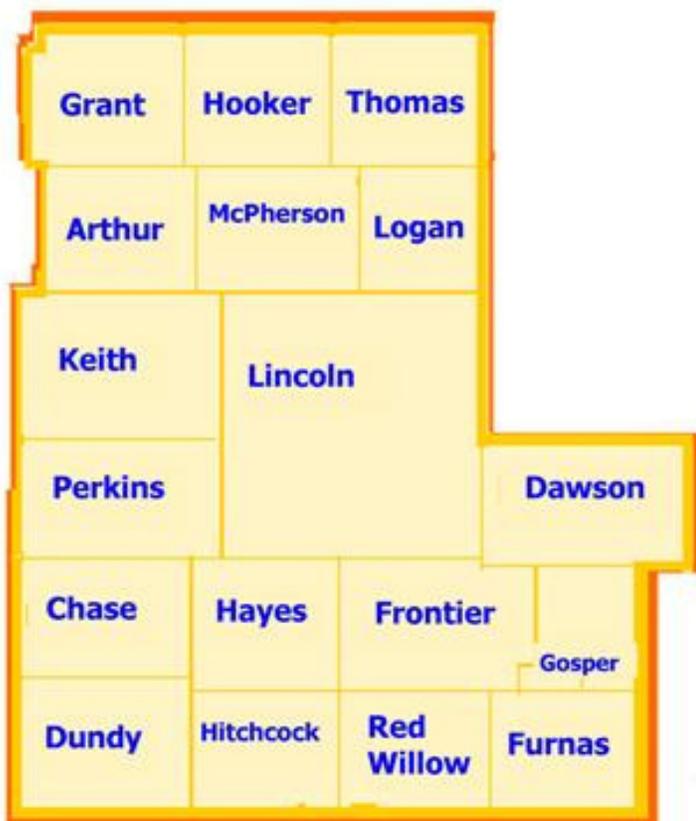
Nebraska Kids Fitness & Nutrition Day (NKFND) is a one-day event for 4th grade students in the district. This fun filled day includes 6 nutrition stations and 13 fitness stations. Across the district this day is held in 2 locations. One location is in McCook at the McCook Community College Peter and Dolores Event Center with 272 students attending. The other location was held in Grant at Perkins County School with 158 students attending. NKFND would not have been possible without the many sponsors and the help of 100 volunteers between the two locations. Nutrition Stations teach information about portion sizes, how to read labels, and how to have good eating habits. Fitness stations teach students the benefit of exercise for healthy living.

# Respite

Respite provides family caregivers a break from taking care of a loved one 24 hours a day/7 days a week. Many people do not realize that they need a break or that they could receive help from Respite. Grandparents often fall into this category, as they may be raising grandchildren with various disorders, such as autism spectrum, reactive attachment disorder (RAD), attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), bipolar, and aggressive or disruptive behaviors. Children with individualized education plans (IEP) may also qualify for respite care.

SWNPHD hosts the Southwest Service Area of the Nebraska Lifespan Respite program. Covering 18 counties, the Southwest Respite Coordinator assists families who are caring for a loved one with a disability or long-term illness, at any age. These family caregivers use respite to get a break from full-time caregiving, with many using the time to rest, go to appointments, or do other self-care activities.

This year, we were able to sign up 2 additional respite providers, bringing the total of providers to 36. We were also able to increase our caregiver families from 69 to 75.



## Tobacco

SWNPHD spent the last year redesigning and refocusing on our tobacco program. Since our district has the highest rate of smokeless tobacco users in the state, we decided to do some focused work in that area. To reach the next generation of potential smokeless tobacco users, we designed and passed out “Quit the Spit, One Mint at a Time” mints at the Dundy County health fair along with educational information around smokeless tobacco.



Vaping has become an epidemic among our youth. To better serve our youth, we needed to further our education around vaping. Many hours were spent on webinars and training to better understand the issue at hand and how to help. We remain members of Tobacco Free Nebraska coalition and joined the Nebraska Disparities coalition; both meet on a quarterly basis to share information and ideas. We remain committed to helping create the first smoke-free generation.

### Ready. Set. Quit.

Call 1-800-QUIT-NOW (784-8669)

1-855-DÉJELO-YA (335-3569)

Quitnow.ne.gov

NEBRASKA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES • TOBACCO FREE NEBRASKA

# PROTECT

The Wellness of All People

## Clinic Services

Clinics have been very busy this year. Services such as labs and immunizations have been in full swing. With our new electronic medical records system, we are now able to have patients onboard into our electronic health records system, DrChrono. Onboarding allows patients to register for appointments at home or on the go which saves time after arriving at the clinic. This is also billing software for insurance that has cut down time spent by staff having to manually enter all the information.

Part of clinic services is to offer low-cost lab draws to those who may not have insurance. This program offers clients the ability to check things such as cholesterol levels, blood sugar levels and help identify if they are at risk for diabetes. Two clients were identified in 2022 that came in for routine health fair labs that had either very high cholesterol levels or elevated levels on the A1C (diabetes screen) and were unaware of these issues. With the assistance of these labs, they were able to seek medical care that helped them lower their risk for heart attack, stroke and complications related to diabetes. 17 Flu clinics were held throughout the district which led to 425 people being protected against influenza last season.

### CQI Project

SWNPHD embarked on revamping and revitalizing their continuous quality improvement and performance management program. A CQI team was formed and a whole staff priority brainstorming session was held. Of that session there were 4 projects identified to be worked on throughout the year. These projects included vehicle usage standardization, implementation of a performance management system (VMSG), checking eligibility prior to services being rendered, and the implementation of the DrChrono portal for onboarding clients prior to their arrival for appointments. It was the first time that several of the staff had been exposed to the process and tools used in performance management and quality improvement. The SWNPHD team is becoming more comfortable with the performance and quality improvement culture and looking forward to our prioritization session for the upcoming year.



Flu Clinic held at the Lemoyne Senior Center

### Vaccines for Children (VFC) & Vaccines for Adults (VFA)

Vaccines for Children is a program that is federally funded to help children with no insurance, under insured (those who have insurance, but insurance does not cover vaccines), those on Medicaid, or those who are Native American or Alaskan to be able to get the required or recommended vaccines at no cost. This program is helpful in keeping the herd immunity strong so that diseases of the past do not sneak back in causing unnecessary illness to children. 437 shots were given to children aged 2 months to 18 years.

VFA provides adults who have no insurance the ability to get up to date with recommended vaccines such as Tdap (Tetanus, diphtheria and pertussis) as well as Influenza, Hepatitis A and Hepatitis B.

### Environmental Public Health

SWNPHD assisted with 9 environmental concerns from July 1, 2022 to June 30, 2023, addressing residents' concerns regarding food safety, mold clean-up, air quality, nuisance properties, animal complaints, water quality, and body art. All complaints were investigated (within our scope of authority), documented, and provided with any necessary follow-up. While SWNPHD does not have any jurisdiction or resources to correct these concerns, we were able to provide education and work with other community partners in addressing the concerns. If needed, individuals were referred to the proper agencies to address and resolve their concerns.

SWNPHD received a grant at the beginning of 2023 that will allow for an expansion of our environmental program. Staff members attended the NALHD environmental summit in Lincoln and the NEHA National Environmental conference in New Orleans, LA. We are excited to continue to learn about what more we can do to help prevent, promote, and protect the residence of our health district and the environment.

# COVID-19 Testing

SWNPHD has seen a decrease in COVID testing during the first three months of 2023. Total Wellness is a national health and wellness provider based in Nebraska that partnered with public health entities within its home state to assist as needed to provide COVID-19 testing. With this service, SWNPHD provided testing with same-day results. Total Wellness ended their partnership on April 30, 2023. At that time, testing at the health department ended as well. SWNPHD performed 50 COVID-19 tests between our McCook and Ogallala offices from July 2022-June 2023, and continued to offer free home test kits for as long as they were available. SWNPHD handed out 1000+ COVID-19 home test kits to the public.

Home test kits are still available free from the government at [www.covid.gov/test](http://www.covid.gov/test). They can also be purchased at local retailers and pharmacies.

## COVID-19 Vaccination

SWNPHD shared frequent press releases with information about the COVID vaccines and their safety and effectiveness to build confidence and raise vaccination rates in the health district.

43% of all SWNPHD residents have received the minimum vaccination dose (1 or 2 shots). About 52% of these people have received at least one booster dose, including 71% of those aged 60 years and over.

The bivalent boosters that protected against 2 strains of COVID-19 were available at many locations throughout southwest Nebraska during the fall and winter respiratory season of 2022-2023. SWNPHD shared “Where to Find COVID Vaccine” locations and contact information through ads, social media, and flyers. We recommended having a booster dose within at least the last 6 months to reduce the risk of hospitalization or severe illness from COVID-19.

As of June 2023, bivalent COVID vaccine coverage was 57% of ages 65+, 26% of ages 50-64, 14% of ages 30-49, 6% of age 16-29, and 1.3% of ages 0-15.



“ I get the flu and COVID shots, because the public relies on me to keep them safe.

**Live Life**  
Uninterrupted

Find your nearest Vax location at [vaxNE.org](http://vaxNE.org).

Special thank you to Spencer Rowley (son of Lori Rowley, RN) for helping with our vaccination campaign Live Life Uninterrupted

Special thank you to Brad Wheeler (husband of Assistant Director Heidi Wheeler) for helping with our vaccination campaign Live Life Uninterrupted



“ I get vaccinated because there’s more to protecting my community than fighting fires.

**Live Life**  
Uninterrupted

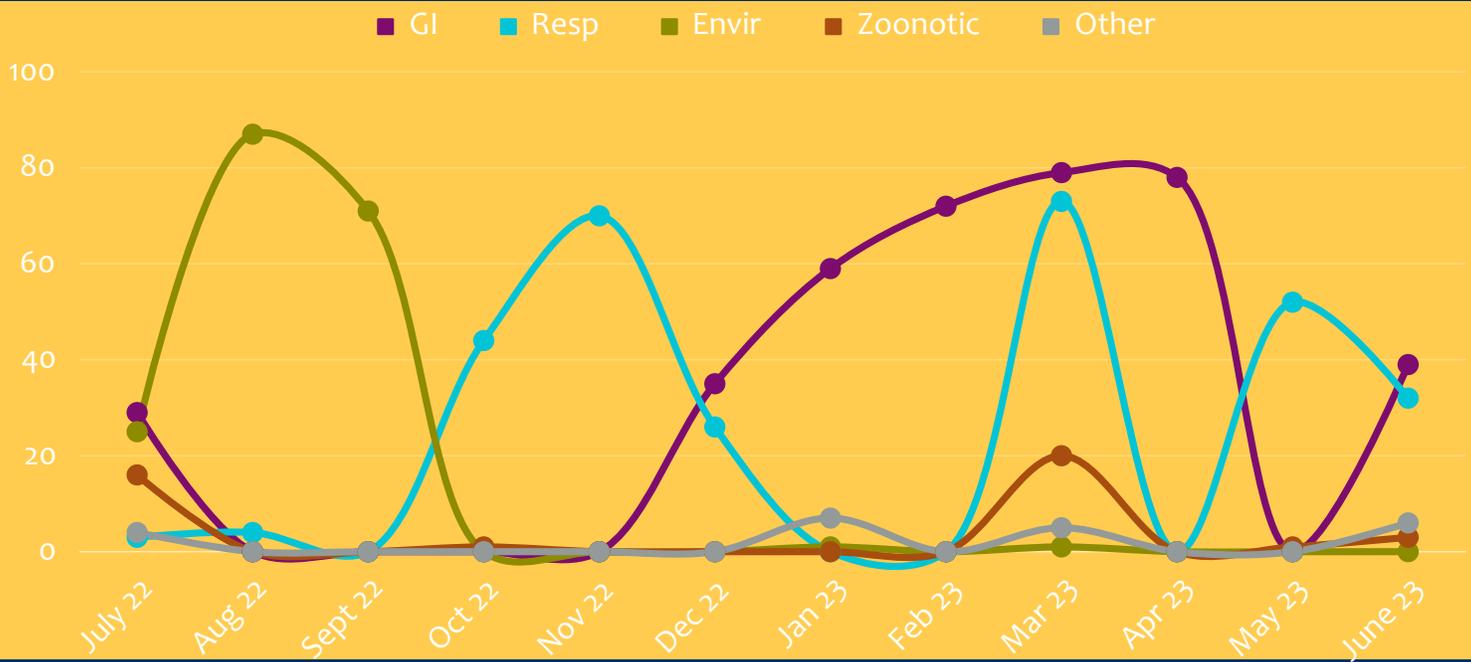
Find your nearest Vax location at [vaxNE.org](http://vaxNE.org).

# Public Health Emergency Preparedness

The Public Health Emergency Preparedness (PHEP) program at SWNPHD continued to monitor COVID-19 testing and protective equipment (PPE) needs throughout the district as the COVID pandemic began to wind down. SWNPHD served as a collection and distribution point for the CDC-issued testing kits for the schools and daycares in our jurisdiction. Practices and data were collected and analyzed and constructed into after action reports with lessons learned and gaps identified and prioritized for improvement.

The PHEP coordinator worked alongside the MHI staff to help implement health screening PODS for our minority community members, developing them with Incident Command principles and mass dispensing best practices. These PODs are instrumental in assisting our minority community in learning about COVID-19, preventative care, and connecting with providers.

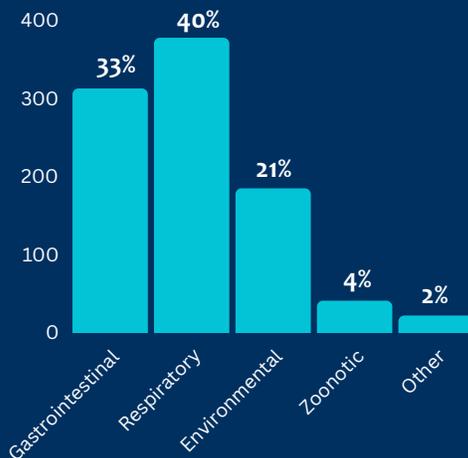
In March 2023 the Operation PHISH Bait tabletop exercise was planned and executed with the staff of SWNPHD, DHHS, and NPHCC. This was a preparedness exercise involving cyber security and the response to a cyber-attack. An after-action report identified gaps in preparedness for this type of event. The gaps included reviews and updates for policies and procedures, annual and ongoing cybersecurity training, and staff education on SWNPHD's Hazards Vulnerability Assessment. All improvement items have been addressed and/or implemented.



## Reportable Disease Surveillance

Between July 2022 and June 2023, SWNPHD investigated 939 reportable events in the nine counties of the district, representing over 57 diseases. The top three most common investigations were for respiratory panels, 18%, blood lead levels, 18%, and COVID-related investigations, 13%. Together, these three comprised nearly half of reports. The other half represent a wide range of reportable diseases that can be split into 5 categories.

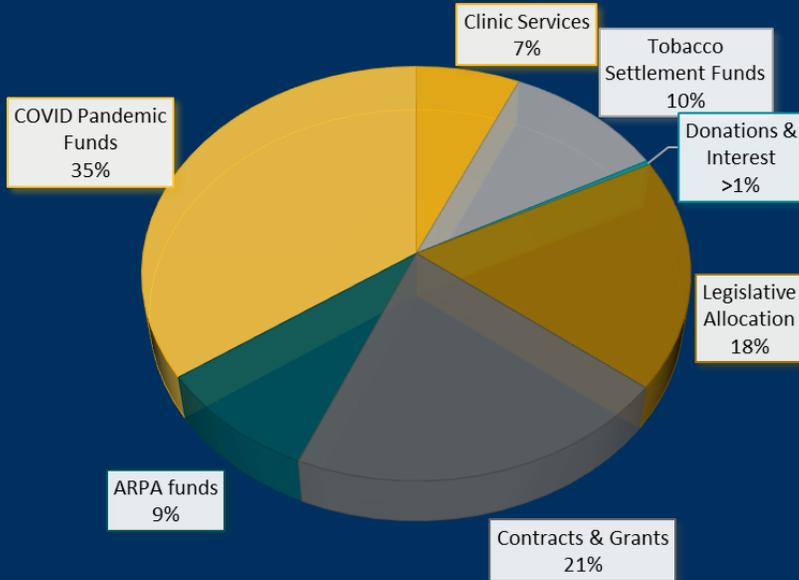
1. Gastrointestinal (stomach bugs) peaked during the winter and spring.
2. Respiratory (fever and cough) peaked during fall and winter, with another spike in March 2023.
3. Environmental (heavy metals, lead) peaked during summer.
4. Zoonotic (animal or insects) are less common in SWNPHD but more often require further investigation, usually occurring in spring and summer.
5. Other diseases that do not fit into one of the above categories.



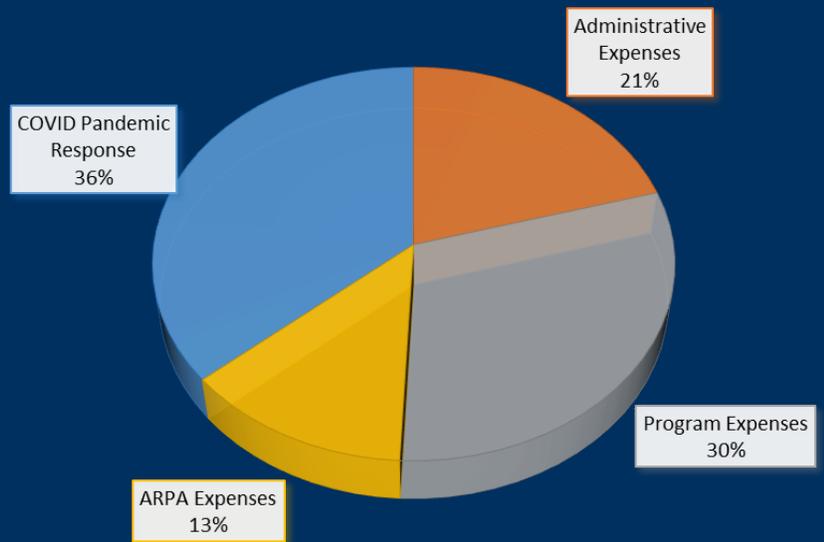
# Financial Reports

July 2022 - June 2023

## REVENUE



## EXPENSES



## American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Funding

Each of the 18 local health departments in Nebraska received funds in accordance with Neb. Rev. Stat. 71-1628.08. Split equally, each of the 18 health departments received \$555,000 for one-time infrastructure needs and any other costs, including testing, personal protective equipment, and other preventive measures to combat the COVID-19 virus and any of its mutations.

Allowable uses of funds included but were not limited to salaries and wages, fringe benefits, supplies, equipment, other capital expenditures, professional services, and facility occupancy. Funds could be used to support health department infrastructure and building fees or renovations, provide equity-focused services, or to provide premium pay to the health department workforce.

Southwest Nebraska Public Health Department utilized \$219,251 of the \$555,000 funding in fiscal year 2022-2023. Expenditures included: workforce development for staff, work to pursue accreditation, accessible door installation, purchase of 2 leased vehicles, SMART board and meeting room microphones, meeting room tables and chairs, security cameras, data reporting and software, and plumbing upgrades.

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**Visit our updated website!**  
[swhealth.ne.gov](https://swhealth.ne.gov)

SWNPHD is always working to increase access to health information and services, making information easier to use and understand. In 2022-2023, we added or improved the following:

- Online check-in option for appointments
- Webpage updates
- Simplified website navigation
- Additional social media platforms including TikTok and YouTube channels
- 2 staff members completed the IHA Health Literacy Certification course
- Interpreter software through Multilingual Technologies providing access to over 200 languages including American Sign Language with live certified medical interpreters

*The mission of Southwest Nebraska Public Health Department, in partnership with other entities, is to promote a healthy and secure quality of life for our communities.*

