



**DATE:** April 30, 2020

**TO:** Nebraska Healthcare Providers

**FROM:** Dannette R. Smith, MSW  
Chief Executive Officer  
Department of Health and Human Services

**RE:** Fair Access to Health Services

On April 29, 2020, Tony Green, Interim Director of the DHHS Division of Developmental Disabilities, spoke at Governor Ricketts' daily COVID-19 press conference. He shared a message on behalf of Chief Medical Officer Gary Anthone, MD, and me regarding guidance from the Office for Civil Rights (OCR) at the US Department of Health and Human Services.

Dr. Anthone and I confirm OCR's guidance that the provision of healthcare "must be guided by the fundamental principles of fairness, equality, and compassion that animate our civil rights laws." Healthcare providers are obligated to follow laws and regulations that prohibit discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, disability, age, sex, and exercise of conscience and religion. Fair access to health services is never more essential than now, during the COVID-19 emergency.

I encourage all providers to read this OCR [bulletin](#), which offers several recommendations to ensure fair service to all, including:

- Provide effective communication with individuals who are deaf, hard of hearing, blind, have low vision, or have speech disabilities through the use of qualified interpreters, picture boards, and other means;
- Provide meaningful access to programs and information to individuals with limited English proficiency through the use of qualified interpreters and through other means;
- Address the needs of individuals with disabilities, including individuals with mobility impairments, individuals who use assistive devices, auxiliary aids, or durable medical equipment, individuals with impaired sensory, manual, and speaking skills, and individuals with immunosuppressed conditions including HIV/AIDS in emergency planning.