

Disability Rights Nebraska

Protection and Advocacy for People with Disabilities

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: 5-4-20

STATE AFFIRMS ADVOCATES' REQUEST TO ISSUE COVID-19 GUIDANCE TO PROTECT NEBRASKANS WITH DISABILITIES

Disability Rights Nebraska commends Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services CEO Dannette Smith and Chief Medical Officer Dr. Gary Anthonie for issuing guidance to all healthcare providers affirming anti-discrimination laws are in force during COVID-19. A copy of the Department memo is attached.

On April 8th, disability advocates from 16 organizations across the state made a formal request for such guidance. <https://www.disabilityrightsnebraska.org/covid-19-updates.html> "Many Nebraskans have been feeling fearful about the possibility of discrimination in the event of healthcare shortages such as ventilators, given the fact that several states made early proposals to deny care to some patients on the basis of their disability, age or medical history. CEO Smith's statement affirms the federal Office of Civil Rights guidance and should give comfort to the many Nebraskans we've been hearing from since the pandemic began," said CEO Eric Evans. "This guidance may very well save lives."

The new guidance from DHHS states "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." CEO Smith further wrote "Fair access to health services is never more essential than now, during the COVID-19 emergency."

Evans noted, "People with disabilities, especially those living in congregate facilities, are highly vulnerable to COVID-19. CEO Smith's directive promises every Nebraskan will receive access to care without pushing certain categories to the back of the line. Over the next weeks, we'll continue to monitor how Nebraska facilities are ensuring the health and safety of people residing in their care."

Disability Rights Nebraska has created a COVID-19 online survey for anyone living in a facility—whether a nursing home, jail, psychiatric ward, group home, assisted living facility—and encourages anyone living in a facility, recently released from a facility, or someone with a loved one in a facility to fill out the survey. <https://www.disabilityrightsnebraska.org/covid-19-facilities-survey.html>

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Disability Rights Nebraska is a private, nonprofit 501(c)(3) that has been designated to provide protection and advocacy services in Nebraska. Disability Rights Nebraska is the only organization mandated to pursue legal and/or other remedies to defend the rights of Nebraskans with disabilities. Learn more at <https://www.disabilityrightsnebraska.org/>

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