



Dannette R. Smith

CEO | Department of Health & Human Services

Dannette R. Smith was appointed Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Department of Health and Human Services for the state of Nebraska in February of 2019. She brings more than 25 years of executive leadership experience in large, complex organizations to the State. She has spearheaded the development of the Department's business plan, which supports Governor Pete Ricketts' strategic vision. The plan outlines her four-pronged approach to leading the Department with the overarching strategy of 1) creating an integrated service delivery system; 2) establishing and enhancing collaborative relationships with community, stakeholders, and policymakers 3) aligning

DHHS teammates under the mission of Helping People Live Better Lives; and 4) enhancing the Department's internal infrastructure to provide more effective, efficient, customer-focused services to Nebraskans.


Smith has been a catalyst for creating innovative programmatic and technological solutions and to improving the operational structure of DHHS. A fiscally adept leader, Smith's expertise in budget oversight has helped ensure solvency in managing federal and state funding. In Nebraska and other jurisdictions, she has been closely involved with Chambers of Commerce, Economic Development Departments, law enforcement agencies, and community engagement advocates in the area of workforce development. Smith's banking and financial literacy initiatives, in partnership with those organizations, have helped individuals in those communities move towards self-sufficiency and autonomy.

Managing a budget of approximately \$3.5 billion, five (5) divisions and more than 4,600 staff, she currently oversees a number of large-scale initiatives including:

- Medicaid expansion in Nebraska also known as Heritage Health Adult
- Transformation and development of the Youth Rehabilitation and Treatment Center (YRTC) System
- DHHS Division of Public Health's COVID-19 pandemic response
- Advancement of iServe Nebraska, an integrated information technology structure and business process improvement initiative
- Creation of a comprehensive youth system, including therapeutic and behavioral health services, in collaboration with other state agencies and community partners
- Increased transparency of DHHS initiatives and programs to the public through greater engagement with Nebraska communities
- Championing new Governor sanctioned initiatives, such as North Omaha Economic Development Council in partnership with the Nebraska Department of Economic Development
- Worked with agencies and partners to improve child well-being in Nebraska, moving Nebraska's ranking in child well-being from #12 to #8 according to the Annie E. Casey Foundation

Smith attributes much of her success to community engagement and the belief that when you bring stakeholders to the table, whether opposed or supportive, there is great opportunity for creative solutions. In 2020 and 2021 Smith was an Inspire Awards finalist in the category of Excellence in Government Service. Prior to joining DHHS, Smith was the Director of the Virginia Beach Department of Human Services. She has also worked in a leadership capacity in Cook County, IL, Mecklenburg County, NC, Atlanta, GA, and Seattle, WA.

Smith serves on the Council of State Governments as Co-Chair of the Human Services Task Force Subcommittee, she is also the chair of the board for the American Public Human Services Association (APHSA), and is a fellow for the Milbank Foundation Fellowship. The fund is a nonpartisan foundation focused on improving the health of communities and entire populations.



She holds a Bachelor of Science in Psychology from Eastern Michigan University, and a Master of Social Work from the University of Illinois in Chicago. Under the auspices of the Child Welfare League of America, she completed the child welfare leadership program at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government. She also participated in the County Administration Program at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.