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WILL COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT HEARS 6TH ANNUAL STATE OF THE AGENCY ADDRESS

JOLIET, IL – On Friday, January 21, Susan Olenek, Executive Director of the Will County Health Department [WCHD], gave her annual State of the Agency address.

Director Olenek praised the department for its work during the pandemic. Even with staffing shortages and the challenges COVID-19 creates, WCHD and the Community Health Center [CHC] maintained their 38 programs and continued to serve the people of Will County.

2021 proved to be a year of significant accomplishment for WCHD as it grew and adapted to meet the changing health needs of Will County. This past year, WCHD formally dedicated the new WCHD building. Also, WCHD made several technological and organizational improvements that will allow it to better serve the community. All of this, and more, was accomplished while WCHD continued its comprehensive response to COVID-19.

WCHD started two new programs this past year: STOP and Increasing Well-Woman Visits. STOP [Substance Treatment Options Program] is an outpatient substance use treatment for adults. Increasing Well-Woman Visits is a program designed to ensure the continued health of women within our community by providing annual preventative medical visits.

Looking forward to 2022, Director Olenek identified two new services that should greatly benefit Will County. WCHD will roll out a permanent, agency-wide call center. When it begins, specially trained call center staff will be capable of assisting the people of Will County in accessing all the services of WCHD.

The Behavioral Health Department of WCHD will be starting a new phone-based crisis program, Program 590, that will be linked to a new, nationwide 988 call system. Scheduled to begin on July 1, Program 590 is designed to have a team of trained and experienced specialists respond to mental and behavioral health issues.

Director Olenek recognized the importance of the support of the Board of Health, the County Executive's office, and the Will County Board in WCHD's ability to fulfill its mission.

This sixth State of the Agency address was given virtually because of the recent spike in COVID-19 cases.

The text of Director Olenek's State of the Agency address can be found on the WCHD [webpage](#).

For more information visit willcountyhealth.org

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NEWS release

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Will County Public Health dates back to 1942 when \$50,000 was allocated for local Environmental Health, Maternal-Child Health, and Infectious Disease Control initiatives. In 1940, roughly 115,000 people called Will County home; in 2020, nearly 700,000 do. Today Will County Health Department strives to bring its vision—to deliver sustainable programs and policies in response to the public health needs of the community—to all of the people of Will County.



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Will County
Health Department &
Community Health Center

2022

State of the Agency



Susan Olenek MAOL

Will County Health Department &
Community Health Center
1/21/2022

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SCRIPT

Hello, Happy New Year, and welcome to the 6th annual State of the Agency address. Yes! It has been 6 years since my first agency address! Unfortunately, we are still not able to come together as a large group, but most of us are pros on these virtual meetings, so this will have to do for yet another year. This state of the agency address is going to be a little longer this year... there is so much we've accomplished, so much we've learned, endured, and so much I want to share.

Well, 2021 felt much like 2020 in terms of disruption to everyday life, both at work and at home. And we all know why...

Every day, since February of **2020**- almost 2 years ago-our programs and operations have been heavily influenced by COVID-19. Isolation and quarantine requirements, masking, and social distancing mandates, and of course staff shortages due to the ravages of the pandemic on our workforce, our families, and the community. Unfortunately, since the beginning of the pandemic, we have experienced about 90 positive cases of COVID-19 in the agency. Thankfully all recovered, although some are experiencing the effects of "long COVID".

In 2021, In addition to responding to a global pandemic, the WCHD & CHC continued to provide the typical 38 programs we have within the agency. As in the previous year, we were still required by our funders and programs to continue these services to the community since the pandemic was hitting everyone so hard- financially, mentally, and health wise. And so, we did. In addition to the current programs, we started 2 new programs.... STOP in BH, which is a substance use treatment program. We are working with the Will County court system for referrals, and the program is open to any other county resident needing these services. The other program is the Well Women program in FHS – this is a program to increase routine medical and prenatal care for women of childbearing age. There is also planning taking place in BH for yet another addition to our 24/7 crisis programs, with a rollout scheduled for July 1.

Accomplishments of 2021

So, let's talk about some of our accomplishments from 2021...things **NOT COVID** related...

- We held our building dedication in early September, a celebration overdue, but was well attended and a wonderful event. The Director and Asst. Director of the Illinois Department of Public Health came out to dedicate the building with us and had nothing but praise for our work in the community.
- We installed a whole building generator at the CHC- no more power outages to disrupt their important work.
- We installed an electronic sign at the CHC to advertise our programs and events.
- We mounted our mission statement and core values in every division, and at both branch offices.
- We erected way-finding signage at all HD offices
- Began an all-agency upgrade to our phone system

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- We enhanced our Wi-Fi system to boost the internet signal at the 501 Ella Ave building and the Community Health Center.
- We hired on for the new position of Compliance Officer to our administration team.
- We received approval from our BOH to add another needed leadership position- Director of Administrative Services.
- We continued to transition to the new county financial system - D365, AND a new platform for Kronos, which the entire county will now be using.

These are just a few examples; I know there were many other accomplishments within our programs as well.

Budget and Finances

As it is every year at this time, the previous fiscal year is still “open” in that we are paying bills that came in through November or in December for last fiscal year. We are also accruing back revenue for services received in 2021. We typically have our final fiscal year revenue and expense numbers by the end of February and will share with the BOH as we do annually when we receive them. FY 22 has a budget of \$34,637,640, an increase of approximately 10%. We will again receive the same \$10 million levy from the county, our projected fees are slightly higher, as is our projected grant revenue- to a total of almost \$1.5M. We will experience some increased billing rates for services, as well as the ability to continue to bill for our telehealth visits, which are occurring in BH and the CHC. We will be funded by multiple grants (at this time, at least 5) for our COVID-19 response activities. This grant funding has allowed us to hire multiple new staff that have been integral in enhancing our COVID response.

And now let’s talk about COVID-19...

2021 was another year for the world to see what public health is and what we do. Historically, local public health departments have always been in the background, working quietly doing prevention, education, surveillance, monitoring, compliance, and in our case primary care too. I firmly believe that public health will continue to enjoy a seat at the table in terms of planning and prevention programs. My hope is there will be more sustained funding and opportunity to educate, outreach, and planning as well as using information to make data-driven decisions.

WCHD’s COVID-19 response has been a series of phases—contact tracing, vaccine distribution, mass vaccination clinics, community pop-up clinics, homebound vaccinations, school-based clinics, resource coordination for housing and other needed services, providing guidance and support to LTCFs, workplaces, other county departments, schools, etc.....community COVID testing, marketing plans and execution, website enhancements, our vaccine equity initiative, community based organization funding to aid in maximizing our vaccination efforts, health navigator outreach, the arts and advocacy partnership, our booster campaign, enforcement of state mandates, our parent survey and pediatric vaccine campaign, our call center and hotline

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initiatives, vaccine card replacement program, the Binax Now rapid test distribution program, and all the logistics, supplies, staffing, and technology needs for every single one of these projects.

If you saw a lot of new faces this past year, it's because we hired on almost 150 new staff in 2021. Contact tracers, site coordinators, nurses, administrative and support staff, managers, ITT staff, HR staff, customer service representatives, health navigators, CD investigators and managers. We also contracted with multiple outside vendors for professional services like our call center, our marketing firm, and equipment vendors for things like signage, tenting, tables, etc. for our community clinics.

Our agency has been responding to this pandemic since February 2020 and continues to do so. Our response has changed as the needs have changed. Our initial response, the CD portion- the contact tracing and surveillance continues! That staff have been up to their eyeballs in COVID-19 since day 1! Last year I told you that responding to this pandemic has felt like we are building the boat as we cast out to sea.... We have learned as we go, we have changed our response when we learn something more. Well, it feels pretty much the same, but at least maybe half the boat is built! 😊

Thank you to all who have contributed to our response as well as those who have continued to keep our programs running. This response has taken a real team effort- every division, every department, all offices have been involved in the effort. I truly feel blessed to be working with people who care about each other AND their community- it certainly shows! Fortunately, with several vaccines under development and distribution, we now have a light at the end of the tunnel, and we are working toward a concerted goal. I don't know how many people will ultimately receive the vaccine, and it is way too early to tell when we may be able to enjoy more normalcy in our lives, but this agency has been an integral part of the response to a global pandemic, a truly historic event, and we have served our community well!

On the horizon for 2022...

As we continue much of the same work in 2022, let's remember this is what we're here for, this is public health, and our community now has a clearer image and better understanding of what we do and who we are. And I need to share with all of you... I think I received a record number of compliments this year on our staff. I received many phone calls, emails, even texts of people we know and don't know, and they had such positive, nice things to say about all of you. How helpful you were, how kind you were, how compassionate you were..... Thank you!

Some initiatives we are working on for this coming year...

With the hiring of Chuck Flood as our Compliance Officer, we will be formalizing our compliance and privacy policies and training. Chuck will be working with all division leadership to ensure we have a robust and effective compliance program. Many of you will see him throughout the buildings and work areas running our compliance program.

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We also anticipate some changes and improvements on our website and social media platforms. Matt Bedore, our new Media Services Manager is working on several upgrades and changes in our communications platforms. He will also be working with our professional marketing firm the Fource, who has been executing our COVID response campaigns. In addition to the COVID response work, the FOURCE will be utilizing their talents and expertise to market the Will County Health Department brand. The Fource will be optimizing our brand to help boost our hiring numbers, for the new substance use program, and for the general services of the CHC. Prior to COVID, we never utilized the services of a professional marketing firm, but we've seen their effectiveness and want to make that investment in the entire agency.

In 2022 we will be rolling out an agency-wide call center, permanently. Currently, we have multiple staff in many divisions answering phones and making appointments. We utilize an automated calling attendant which has proven to be very confusing to our callers who end up in the wrong department, wrong division, or just give up. That's not good customer service, and I'm guessing we are losing many customers, clients, and patients this way. Not to mention the customers that need our services like in EH, Vision and Hearing, or Birth and Death records. The call center is being designed to answer every call. No auto-attendant. The call center staff will be trained on customer service best practices, will be given all the resources they need to answer questions, they will have expertise to make appointments in BH and the CHC, and they will be managed by our new Operations Coordinator, Kristi Cage, who has several years of operations and call center experience.

BH will be rolling out a new crisis program through IDHS. It is called Program 590 and it will be another 24/7/365 program. This will be linked with the new nationwide 988 call system, which is designed for response to mental or behavioral health issues. Instead of law enforcement responding thru the 911 system, our BH staff will be responding with or without law enforcement to the crisis, through the 988 system. The goal is to divert mental health emergencies from law enforcement and to behavioral health clinicians who are trained and experienced for this type of response. We will be responding in teams, not alone. The team is comprised of a BH clinician called a Crisis Response Specialist, and an Access to Care Specialist. This program is to begin July 1 of this year.

Administration will be administering 3 grants in relation to COVID-19. An extension to the CT grant, an extension of the MV grant, and a grant thru IDPH's ARPA funding workforce development, and equity outreach.

The county will be receiving over \$130M in ARPA funds, and as requested we have made application for approximately \$10M in staffing, service enhancements, operational supplies, and program expenses not otherwise covered by a grant. These funds will enhance our current programs, help us plan for expansion of other programs, and begin new programs.

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As always, I would like to thank our Board of Health for all their support! They volunteer their time, and have been right beside us, supporting us as they always do. **And so, I say thank you!**

I would also like to thank the County Executive's office and the county board for all they do to support our agency. Many of the CB members contact me and ask questions, they are interested in our regular reports and programs, and we appreciate their support and interest as well. The county board continues to provide financial support, and this past year they gave us \$3M for several unfunded initiatives for our COVID response. Of that \$3M we carried over ~\$716,000 to FY2022 to cover more response expenses that were not grant funded. The county executive's office assisted us with deploying a much-needed call center and contracting with a professional marketing firm to communicate with our residents more effectively.

Of course, I would like to thank you, staff, for all you do daily- what you do, the programs that we provide- truly make a difference in our community. This past year was full of community events- testing, vaccinating, education, and outreach- Our presence was known in every corner of the county- Monee to Plainfield, Wilmington to Frankfort.

Lastly, I would like to recognize the leadership and management staff....

There is absolutely no way we could accomplish all that we do without the constant hard work and dedication of our management team, at all levels! As you can imagine, this year posed even more challenges because along with actively responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, the logistics of staff and/or the public affected by COVID presented many daily challenges. Also, all our programs were required to continue even with COVID. There were service delivery changes, staff shortages, new procedures put into place, new requirements in the workplace, and many staff directly affected by COVID- either by diagnosis, as a close contact, or in our own families. These words don't even scratch the surface of how this pandemic affected our agency. And still does.

Thank you for sharing this time with me, and I look forward to another year of challenges and accomplishments, opportunities, and growth!

If you have any questions, please raise your hand, or type them in the "chat" box.

Thank you for sharing this time with me, and I look forward to all the great things we will accomplish this coming year!

Have a great weekend!

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