

NEWS RELEASE | **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE** | September 2, 2021

Human Services reminds North Dakotans that *Help is Here* to address pandemic-related impacts

BISMARCK, N.D. – As COVID-19 cases grow in North Dakota, state residents may once again begin to experience disruptions at home, at school, at work and in the community.

The North Dakota Department of Human Services reminds residents that programs and services launched earlier in the pandemic to address the financial impact on household incomes as well as behavioral health and other human service needs are available to help them through this latest outbreak. The agency has launched a [Help is Here website](#) to help connect North Dakotans to these resources and programs.

“The rising numbers of confirmed COVID-19 cases and related hospitalizations reported on the North Dakota [Department of Health’s dashboard](#) mean that the need for pandemic-related programs and services that we put in place last year will continue and likely increase,” said DHS Executive Director Chris Jones.

Help for Behavioral Health Needs

“Over the past year, the department has been able to refine and enhance many of these important services,” he said. “We have [Parents Lead](#) resources for parents and educators to support children’s behavioral health, and the [Reach for Resilience](#) program continues to be a resource for health care workers who have witnessed so much loss and grief during this pandemic.”

“In addition, we’ve enhanced our behavioral health crisis response services to offer 24-hour help and support for North Dakotans experiencing a mental health or substance use challenge. Resources include the 211 statewide crisis line, mobile response and walk-in stabilization services at our [regional human service centers](#),” Jones said.

The teams based at the human service centers, North Dakota State Hospital, and Life Skills and Transition Center have continued to provide important in-person services and support throughout the pandemic, using health and safety precautions to protect vulnerable individuals.

Help with Financial Needs

Health and well-being are also connected to financial stability and DHS has responded with new programs to aid North Dakotans experiencing hardship due to the pandemic.

This summer, DHS launched an enhanced rent assistance program, called [ND Rent Help](#), to help North Dakota renters who are struggling to pay rent and have past-due utilities. Its goal is to

-MORE-

prevent evictions and to connect participants to other community resources and services to help stabilize their housing and household finances. This program is an important resource for renters as well as rental property owners and utility companies. A companion program for homeowners is planned to roll out later this year.

North Dakotans struggling to afford groceries are encouraged to apply for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) [online](#) or at their local [human service zone office](#). In response to the pandemic, the SNAP program has provided maximum allowable benefits to participating households and provided grants to grocers so they could update their point-of-sale systems and websites. This has enabled online and by-phone grocery ordering and delivery to SNAP clients.

Help with Child Care

Investments in assuring North Dakotans have access to quality, affordable child care, help children reach their potential, enable parents to work or pursue education and training, and strengthen our communities and our state's economy.

To strengthen support for families, DHS has waived the [Child Care Assistance Program's](#) family co-payments and also pays participating child care providers for all authorized care hours, even when children are absent due to quarantine or other approved reasons.

During the pandemic, child care enrollments have fluctuated as families have grappled with distance learning, remote work, job loss, quarantine, and other challenges. DHS offered Child Care Emergency Operating Grants to licensed providers, enabling most to continue to care for children. DHS is poised to issue a new round of grants soon to support health and safety and access to quality early childhood services for working parents.

Whether it's our grants to child care providers, Medicaid payments for telehealth services, behavioral health investments and direct services, short-term financial help and other support, DHS is committed to helping North Dakotans during this pandemic, Jones said.

DHS encourages individuals to monitor COVID-19 cases in their local community by visiting the [Department of Health's website](#) and to reach out for help by visiting the [Help is Here](#) website.

###

CONTACT:

Heather Steffl | 701-328-4933
hsteffl@nd.gov

LuWanna Lawrence | 701-328-1892
lklawrence@nd.gov