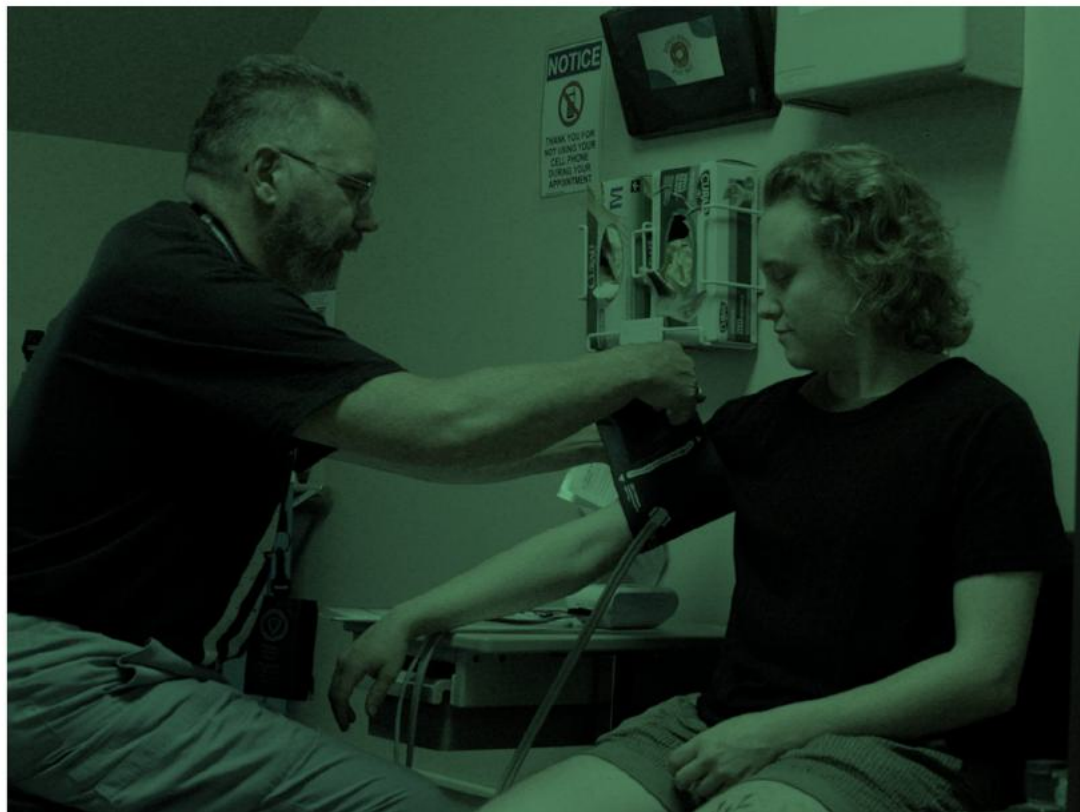




# 2022-2023 BIENNIAL REPORT





# Black Hawk County Board of Health

July 1, 2021 – June 30, 2023



Wesley Pilkington, PharmD  
2022 Vice Chair, 2023 Chairperson  
Term Expires 2024



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2022 Chairperson  
Term Expired 2022

## Our Staff



## Culture

Teamwork and Collaboration

Outward Mindset

Respect

Resiliency

Trust

Commitment

Engagement

Professionalism

Celebrate

## A letter from the Director

# Leading Through Change



Welcome to the Black Hawk County Public Health (BHCPH) Biennial Report for Fiscal Years 2022 & 2023. This is my first opportunity as Public Health Director to invite the community to share in our successes and accomplishments. Many of the activities included in this report occurred under the leadership of Dr. Nafissa Cisse Egbuonye, Public Health Director 2016–2022. Throughout the past two years, our team has demonstrated extraordinary commitment to mission, vision, and values, all while navigating significant change.

Most significant, during this timeframe has been workforce change within our agency, as well as across the state and nation. In FY22–23, 41% (24/58 positions) of BHCPH staff have started in new roles. Five of seven managerial and senior-level leadership positions were vacated and filled. While this affords professional growth opportunities, it also required intense and innovative recruitment and retention strategies, including a renewed focus on orientation and training for staff new to their roles.

With such a significant change in the workforce, we focused on workforce development by assessing the current learning culture and skills of staff to better inform training and development needs. We partnered with the University of Iowa College of Public Health through a formal Academic Public Health Partnership to develop appropriate assessment tools and share results which guided training and culture workplace strategies.

Public health preparedness and response, including our readiness and capacity to respond to public health events, continues to be a focus. Following the recommendations of our COVID-19 After Action Report, we invested in a renewed focus on public health preparedness training and exercises. In the fall of 2022, we began responding to Mpox, and implemented updated organization and staffing models as part of the response.

We achieved and celebrated national accreditation status by the Public Health Accreditation Board (PHAB) in March 2022, a significant accomplishment that drives programs and services, quality improvement, and collaborative work. The PHAB Site Visit Team recognized the department's commitment to the community, health equity, and an engaged Board of Health as its three biggest strengths.

We continue to provide services to the community through a lens of equity, consistently striving for a community in which all people have a fair and just opportunity to be as healthy as possible. One of the ways we do this is through working with different groups in specific, sensitive ways to address their health issues. I am proud of our focused and sustained efforts because the health of our community impacts everyone.

We are a committed team, dedicated to serving our community. This report would not be possible without our many community partners who do the same. Thank you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kaitlin Emrich".

Kaitlin Emrich

Director of Black Hawk County Public Health



## VISION

We exist to ensure that people in our community have equitable opportunities and resources to lead healthier, more fulfilling, and longer lives.

But it's not just individuals who experience health outcomes – entire communities do too. And like a building – a community depends on a strong stable foundation. At BHCPH, we join with others to forge new solutions and innovative partnerships to strengthen that foundation. Find out more about our vision by **watching this video**.



In April 2023, the Black Hawk County Board of Health declared that all forms of bias, including racism, are a public health crisis. **Learn more here.**

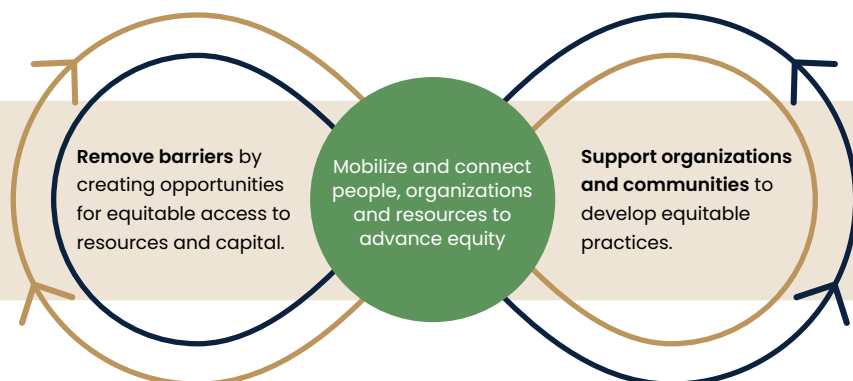
## Advancing Equity in the Cedar Valley

After engaging 76 stakeholders in the initial phases of the system mapping initiative and using the data to inform internal planning, 2022-23 momentum was focused on strategic action for the broader Cedar Valley. BHCPH joined with the Community Foundation of Northeast Iowa and Grow Cedar Valley to host three workshops to consider how to best address the unfair practices and unjust conditions that prevent us from meeting the project's Guiding Star.

Guiding Star:

*A community where people want to live – and a place where they will thrive. Most importantly, a place where everyone sees themselves, and each other, as the beautiful and unique creations we were all meant to be.*

Over 300 stakeholders attended the workshops facilitated by Top RANK, and supported by the University of Iowa College of Public Health & SWIM (See What I Mean). Attendees confronted barriers to hiring and retention, learned from Black leaders already immersed in reducing inequities in the community, and began to develop long-term plans for sustainability. **Learn more about the journey here.**



Based on the data and input provided by attendees during the 2022 workshops, three areas were cited as crucial for ongoing strategic action.

# Collaborating for Community Health Improvement

BHCPH, along with MercyOne, Peoples Community Health Clinic, and UnityPoint Health updated the assessment, priorities, and improvement planning for FY23-25. The Steering Committee for the process recommended a focus on assessing the impacts of COVID-19 for disproportionately impacted communities, data hub development, and a continuation of work from the previous cycle with health equity as a foundational principle. The full Community Health Assessment (CHA) and Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP) are on our website. [Learn more here.](#)



FY22-23 highlights include:



BHCPH launched a **data hub** that will serve as a central dashboard for community health data. The hub houses data for the CHA-CHIP priority issues and will be expanded to meet community needs.



UNI and BHCPH partnered for the “2022 Assessment of Retail Food Stores” in Black Hawk County Report. The data from the report led to the formation of the Cedar Valley Regional Food and Farm Network Food Access Subcommittee who will implement recommendations from the report that align with the CHIP. The report also informed the community garden project; see the last page for details.



BHCPH worked with community partners to compile **mental health resources** and trainings for mental health and suicide prevention. The website includes resources for immediate help, reducing stigma, and expanded culturally and linguistically adapted resources and information.



Expanding care coordination and patient navigation are a focus of convenings for the Cedar Valley's community health workers/navigators as they explore how to best share resources and align efforts to improve the health of the community.

## Food Safety Education Across Cultures

Keeping the community safe from food-borne illnesses is a core public health function that requires strict adherence to food licensing regulations. These regulations are complex and differ depending on the type of organization selling food. This was illustrated during a large cultural event in the Karenni community, when food sales were closed due to safety issues. This could have been devastating to BHCPH's relationship with the Karenni community.

Instead, Environmental Health Officer Matt Nogrehkar reached out to his coworker, Community Program Coordinator Layna Mee (pictured below). “We want to educate, before we regulate,” said Matt. “If you're not building any connections, you're not making a change. We work to build those connections so that we can make sure we have a healthier community overall.”



What started out as a difficult conversation, quickly became an opportunity for collaboration and education. Layna, who is also a member of the Karenni community, worked with Matt to plan a training for interested community members on what is required for temporary food sales, the importance of getting a license, and basic food safety practices.

The project was later scaled into a video that was widely shared throughout the Karenni community. “At first the community was scared because of the rules and regulations,” said Layna, “But now they know we are here to guide them through it, and then they see us as a resource for other services as well.”

BHCPH performed **1,488** food inspections in FY23



Our mission is to protect people in our community from health hazards, promote healthy behaviors, and prevent disease.



Find out more about our model by **watching this video.**

## Using Data to Inform Outreach

"Public Health is Where You Are," is a slogan that has guided BHCPH for the past two years to illustrate the outreach efforts of our public health staff. But what about the parent who is too busy to attend a community event? How will they know if their home has lead paint? How will they even know about the risk?

These were the concerns for Healthy Homes Coordinator Alex Writz when she reached out to her coworker Epidemiologist Aaron Reinke. She asked for his help using data such as census data, home assessment data, and homes with known lead paint hazards, to help her identify neighborhoods at highest risk for lead paint hazards.

*"Data gives us a direction to go. We might have ideas, we may think we know the direction to focus, but if we have data, we are able to pinpoint our efforts, in this case to actual neighborhoods." – Aaron*



Rather than hoping families would come to them at an outreach event, Alex and Aaron created a map using the data listed above and prioritized neighborhoods at highest risk for lead paint. Using data in this way, helped Alex and her coworkers focus their education efforts in a way that was much more meaningful. "We were able to reach people who were walking to the convenience store in their neighborhood, rather than expecting them to come to a specific event," reflected Alex. "We even had some people come out of their homes and cross the street to come talk to us."

PREVENT. PROMOTE. PROTECT.

## The Vital Role of Cancer Screening

Annette Yousse was diagnosed with breast cancer after attending a free Mammogram Night in 2021. Her advice to people putting off cancer screening? "Just do it. Stop making excuses and just do it. If you are negative great, if it's positive for cancer, find it early when it's easier to treat." Annette credits the collaboration between the Care for Yourself Program and MercyOne for finding her cancer early when it was most treatable.

BHCPH Care for Yourself Coordinator Crystal Schmitz agrees. She works to improve access to cancer screening in Black Hawk and five surrounding counties. The program collaborates with local providers so participants can see the someone they know and trust. Covered services include wellness exams with a breast/chest exam, a pelvic exam/Pap Test and mammogram if indicated. Diagnostic services for breast and cervical cancer are also covered, along with navigation to cancer treatment when appropriate.

Hear Annette's story



In FY23 **234** people enrolled for cancer screening.

**213** mammograms provided in 6-county radius.


# Transforming Lives Through Service

“When I first arrived in Iowa, I was very ill,” said one client. “But since meeting a public health nurse and other BHCPH staff for my disease, they helped me with anything that I needed to feel better in my health. They helped me take my medications as prescribed by my doctor, reminded me of my medical appointments, and connected me to resources like the food bank. BHCPH also made sure that my family was healthy and safe.”

The client is speaking of her experiences with BHCPH disease intervention specialists who are on the frontlines of outbreaks from any reportable infection in Black Hawk County. “This could include everything from anthrax, flu, measles, food-borne illness, Zika, and Ebola to HIV, STIs, COVID-19, and tuberculous (TB)” said Program Manager Sarah Mergenthaler. The team at BHCPH includes epidemiologists, disease prevention specialists, nurses, and community health workers. They are active in contact tracing and case investigations, but the work is often expanded to include resource navigation for immediate needs like transportation, translation, food, or housing.

## Reportable Infections Investigated by BHCPH

	2021	2022
STI	1670	1401
Select Enteric Diseases	54	68
Active TB	*Case counts suppressed	8
Rabid Animals	0	2



**Reviewed Immunization records**  
for 87 schools and childcare centers in Black Hawk County

# Our Clinic’s Dedication to Community Well-being

From oral health to sexual health, from maternal care to childcare, the staff that work with the public health clinic services are dedicated to improving the lives of the people they serve. Our oral health team visits schools in four counties to protect the mouths of our littlest community members. In FY23, the team screened 3,606 children in 30 schools which resulted in identifying the following decay rates by county:



Our sexual health clinic provides free and confidential testing and treatment for sexual health infections that if left untreated, could cause permanent health problems. We contract with doulas who work one-on-one with Black-identifying mothers to help improve birth outcomes. Our childcare nurse consultants provide important health & safety education and guidance to early childhood centers and home daycares. The services provided by our public health clinic promote healthy living for people in Black Hawk County and beyond.

### FY23 By the Numbers



**1,942** Sealants

**4,776** Oral health screenings in four counties.

**4,670** Fluoride applications



Provided support for **253** childcare centers and home daycares in four counties.



**3** Doulas contracted for support to Black-identifying mothers in Black Hawk County.



## Passing Down Traditions at Highland Park Community Garden

"We are ... planting a garden!" exclaims Kathryn Gilbery, BHC PH's Nutrition Community Program Coordinator describing the Highland Park Community Garden (HPCG) in a recent [video](#). The garden is the first in the area to intentionally create space for diverse community members to grow their own food. HPCG, developed in 2023 between BHC PH, UNI, Highland Neighborhood Association, the city of Waterloo, and gardeners, was in response to recent assessments citing food insecurity and access to culturally relevant foods as priorities and fits with the strategies listed in the CHIP.

BHC PH Community Health Workers like Julie Molisho were essential to site planning and promoting the garden. "It's a dream come true – I didn't know that this was a need and an aspiration in my community!" she said. And this is just the beginning; a second garden is in the planning stage as well as infrastructure and expansion at HPCG. Organizers know that some gardeners would like to expand their space to sell produce as well. Supporting these aspiring farmers will have ripple effects for the community including better access to culturally relevant food at local grocery stores and farmers markets. Culturally and linguistically adapted education for gardeners that want to grow for food production will also be developed in collaboration with the Black Hawk Soil and Water Conservation District.

### Gardeners represent growing knowledge from...

- Democratic Republic of Congo
- Mexico
- Guatemala
- Liberia
- Myanmar
- United States



Community members with roots in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Mexico, Guatemala, Liberia, and Myanmar are learning the ups and downs of starting a garden and passing down their culinary practices and cultural traditions to their children.

– Kathryn Gilbery

