

Delivering information to those at the center of quality care

WE LOVE OUR HUMANS





Wear Your <u>Mask</u> **PROPERLY!**



Wash Your Paws



Get Vaccinated





Carly Clauson, CNA

WEST RIDGE CARE CENTER ACHIEVED **100% VACCINATION RATE**

Being vaccinated as a health worker is very important and helpful as a means of protection. We have lost about 800,000 people to COVID, but those who are vaccinated are way less likely to get hospitalized or to die from the infection. When you are signed up to help others recover from illness, it makes perfect sense to take care of your own health first. If you're a health worker, do yourself and your patients a favor. *Get vaccinated*. (See entire feature pages 6-8)



Toyin Akinola, RN

Dr. Akinola Addresses **COVID-19 Vaccine Concerns** of People of Color

... I don't have a lot of faith and trust in the system... What can you say that will restore my trust and faith in a system that has failed us in the past

(Continued on page 5)



Health Care Worker Survey Regarding Vaccines: Results May Surprise You! (continued on page 3)

- Do you support vaccine mandates?
- Are you more likely to leave the field due to vaccine mandates?
- Are you more likely to remain in the field due to vaccine mandates?

With rapidly changing circumstances, at the time of printing, the information and resources were the most current.

Stay Informed! Share with Others! An electronic version is available at https://www.iowacaregivers.org/hub-newsletter

Special thanks to all of our contributing writers.

Made Possible by an Iowa Department of Public Health Equity and Prioritizing COVID-19 Vaccine Access for Populations Disproportionately Affected by COVID-19 Contract #5882IMM010





Executive Director

PETS PERSPECTIVE ON THE PANDEMIC

For this edition of the Hub, we wanted to engage some New Trusted Messengers and insert a touch of humor by viewing the pandemic through the lens of our four-legged friends who are also impacted! I've tuned out to the hundreds of messages I receive about new guidelines and the latest stats. It's overwhelming and exhausting. Please "paws" and ponder what your pets must be thinking about the past 2 years and perhaps heed their advice.

OUR DECISIONS AND CONCERNS ARE ROOTED IN PERSONAL EXPERIENCES

My mother was born during the 1918 pandemic when vaccines were not available, and I recall stories told by my grandparents about the lives lost and how they feared losing their children or their own lives. In

1955, at the age of seven, I was among the first round of kids to receive a polio vaccine. After seeing those my age affected by polio, my classmates and I were happy to be in the long line stretching across the entire length of our school gymnasium awaiting our turn to get a shot from the nurse at the end of the line in her white uniform and stiffly starched cap. I made sure my daughter received all her childhood vaccinations and in the early 70s when I took her to the pediatrician for a smallpox vaccine, he said they weren't giving them anymore because the likelihood of contracting smallpox was no longer a concern.

I still worry about that today. I thought about my grandchildren and great granddaughters and how I couldn't live with myself if I were to expose them, and they became seriously ill. These are the personal experiences and thoughts that influenced my decision and even though I have some underlying health conditions I chose to get a COVID vaccination and booster.

Each of you have your personal experiences that inform how you make your decisions. People of color may have different concerns. People with disabilities may have specific questions. Those who are child-bearing age may be more hesitant. We also realize you turn to your own trusted messengers for advice. For some that could be your family doctor, pharmacist, co-worker, employer, teacher, best friend, parents, or faith leader. For others it may be the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), your local public health agency or the lowa Department of Public Health. We encourage you to think carefully about the pros and cons of getting vaccinated...the risks and benefits to you, your loved ones, the people you serve, your entire community, schools, the economy, and yes, your four-legged friends. The one thing we all share is a desire to get our lives back. If we all do our part, we can do that.

Conference 2022 SAVE THE DATES! October 10 and 11, 2022



Pam Biklen Program Director, Iowa CareGivers

New location:

FFA Enrichment Center, Ankeny, IA

Our plan is to hold an in-person event, however we will adjust as needed. If we've learned anything over the past few years, it is flexibility and persistence. We hope to see you then! Winners at Caregiving <u>COME ON DOWN!</u> IOWA CAREGIVERS 2022 CONFERENCE

- Outstanding Keynote Speakers
- Agenda Tailored to Topics for Those in Direct Care and Family Caregivers
- Networking With Fellow Caregivers
- Fun Photo Booth
- Exhibitors with Lots of Resources
- COVID Prevention Kits
- Recognition Reception to Honor YOU!

COVID-19 Resources



HELPFUL TIPS ON HANDWASHING ACCORDING TO ZIGGY

"Washing your hands frequently and using hand sanitizer correctly are critically important to the spread of COVID. I generally wash both by hands and my face to be on the safe side, and because it feels good. Take Ziggy's advice and wash your hands or paws often!

https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/when-how-handwashing.html

HELPFUL TIPS ON WEARING MASKS ACCORDING TO INDI

"If worn properly the right masks can help prevent the spread of COVID, protecting both you and those you are around. If not worn properly, as I've demonstrated, it can be very problematic!"





COVID-19 VACCINE CONFIDENCE TOOLKIT

IOWA DDCouncil

#LookingForward Campaign

Preparation, Participation, Power

Many people with developmental disabilities are at a higher risk for serious illness from COVID-19 (the coronavirus). To help educate people about the virus and the vaccine, the Iowa Developmental Disabilities Council put together a campaign to share information and resources that would help Iowans with disabilities make the best decisions for themselves. https://iowaddcouncil.org/looking-forward

HEALTH CARE WORKER SURVEY ON VACCINE MANDATES

(continued from page 1)

54% oppose the vaccine mandates, yet 49% are more likely to remain in the field due to the mandates.

A few months ago, in partnership with Iowa Nurses Association and Iowa Public Health Association, we conducted a survey of direct care workers, nurses, and public health workers regarding their views on COVID-19 vaccine mandates. Many thought mandates would cause a massive departure of existing health care workers from the field which would be tragic given the serious shortages and high turnover that already exist. One fascinating finding is that 54% oppose vaccine mandates, yet 49% are more likely to remain in the field due to the vaccine mandates. That was a reminder that we can't assume that if someone is opposed to the mandates that they oppose getting vaccinated. While our survey isn't a major research study, with 318 responses it is a respectable sample. It provides incredible insights into how these essential workers view the topic of vaccine mandates, but the findings warrant further exploration and analysis by a researcher to improve our overall understanding. Please contact us if you have any questions about the survey at information@iowacaregivers.org

Key findings from 318 respondents:

Will They Leave or Stay In the Field?

- 46% knew someone who had left the field because of COVID-19.
- **49%** are more likely to remain in the field because of the vaccine mandates.
- 18% are more likely to leave the field because of the vaccine mandates.
- **33%** are unsure about whether they will remain in the field.

Do They Support or Oppose Mandates?

- **54%** oppose the vaccine mandates.
- 35% support the vaccine mandates.
- **11%** are unsure whether they support or oppose the vaccine mandate.



WHY I LEFT DIRECT CARE AFTER 32 YEARS

I left my direct care profession after 32 years. My decision was based on fear for my own personal safety and that of residents receiving care. COVID-19 entered my workplace and presented concerns: risk of me getting the virus, passing it on to family and residents, staff shortages, and most fearful was not all my co-workers elected to be vaccinated. When staff tested positive, I had a heavier resident load, worked some 12-hour shifts and on my scheduled days off, and resident cares were rushed. I experienced COVID fatigue, not getting a good night's sleep, and feeling physically and mentally exhausted.



"I'M VACCINATED ... THINK EVERYONE SHOULD GET VACCINATED ... YET I UNDERSTAND PEOPLE'S HESITANCY"

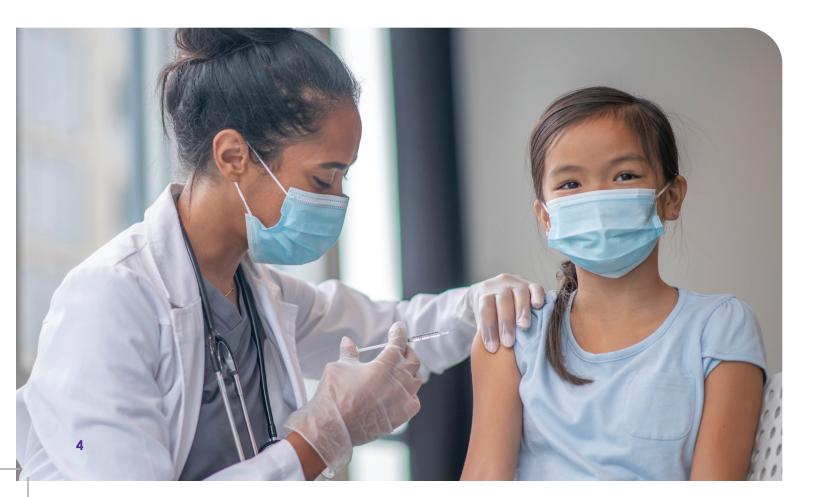


Connie Cohran

I personally have been vaccinated and boosted and so has my husband and granddaughter. My husband and I still got COVID after two vaccinations. I do believe that the vaccine protected my husband from becoming very ill with his health issues. But for myself with no health issues I was very sick. I kept testing negative and my husband positive. BUT I was the one very sick! Finally on the third test it showed positive for COVID. It was six long weeks before I was myself, so I do understand people's hesitancy to being vaccinated.

Although I do wish more people would be vaccinated, I don't think it should be mandated. I feel that everyone should have the right to choose what is best for them. I do hope that as time goes by that more people will see the benefits to being vaccinated and choose to do it. I do think we need to keep educating everyone on this vaccine so that they will be able to make the right and best decision for them, their family, and their community.

Even as a health care provider myself I am still learning and want to continue to learn about this vaccine and the virus because I want and need to be able to protect myself, my family, and the people I take care of. I personally don't care to push my beliefs or opinion on people, but I will continue to hand out a pamphlet that my employer created to help give people the facts and information on this virus and vaccine and hopefully they will be better informed when trying to make the decision to be vaccinated themselves.





WEST RIDGE CARE CENTER ACHIEVED A 100% VACCINATION RATE OF RESIDENTS AND STAFF

As a facility we've been through a war together... cried...laughed, but now emerging through the other side stronger.











Katie Candia, Director of Nursing West Ridge Care Center

Administration and management at West Ridge Care Center made the tough decision to implement a COVID-19 vaccine mandate before the federal government required their health care workers to be vaccinated. That didn't come without challenges and lessons learned but with a solid plan and commitment they achieved a 100% vaccination rate of both residents and staff. Read the extensive interview here:

Question: Given the controversy around COVID-19 vaccine mandates, what process did you go through to make your decision about mandating vaccinations?

West Ridge: First, we checked how to mandate the vaccine legally. We then gave staff adequate notice starting Dec 27th, 2020, by adding a COVID -19 vaccine requirement to our handbook. We gave them until March to get fully vaccinated. As of March 2021 (one year later), 100% of West Ridge staff and residents were vaccinated. We educated all staff about the importance of the vaccine by having multiple meetings and had doctors of different ethnicities come to educate the staff in a Question and Answer (Q&A) format.

Question: Had you had a COVID outbreak prior to implementing the vaccine mandates?

West Ridge: Yes Nov 20th, 2020.

Question: What has been the biggest challenge during the COVID-19 pandemic?

West Ridge: Keeping staff morale and keeping the stress levels low. Seeing how much travel nurses and aides make has been very difficult to compete with. Knowing how expensive it can be on families we delivered covid boxes to our staff homes to help with some of the cost. Some of the boxes included soup, gatorade, sprite, crackers, chips, fresh and canned fruit, hot meal for the day, bread, peanut butter.

Question: Sounds like you have a model COVID-19 plan. Were you required by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) or the state to have a plan? Or was it just good management?



Katie Tenney

"It's all about the residents. We can bring in the virus so anything that we can do to protect them is key."— Katie Tenney, Certified Nursing Assistant



West Ridge Care Center

West Ridge: Since we're not a corporation we did not have any handing down of policies. We had to meet weekly after listening to calls and make our own policies tailored to our building.

Question: Achieving 100% vaccination rate of residents and staff is an amazing feat! And a story that needs to be shared. To what do you attribute your success?

West Ridge: Our staff. Dedication and commitment of the staff and their love for our residents drove the desire to keep them safe. When staff got fearful, we educated every shift with an open-door policy.

Question: How soon into the pandemic did you develop the plan? What are some of the key components of your plan that led to your success?

West Ridge: Management knew that once a vaccine would be available, we would mandate it. The decision was made early on and we gave staff plenty of time for education. We were able to find hope in it and treated each vaccine clinic as a celebration. Congratulating staff and giving them paid time off if they had symptoms related to the vaccine.

Question: Did you lose staff after imposing the mandate?

West Ridge: Out of 110 staff we had two find different employment. Even with allowing exemptions neither could find a doctor willing to sign off on it.

Question: Had people left prior to that because they were concerned about not having a safe work environment?

West Ridge: Two staff decided to find employment out of a nursing home environment in 2020 due to the fear of bringing COVID home to their families. We have staff with elderly parents, immunocompromised children, or were just worried due to their own health histories.

Question: What were some of the biggest concerns about the vaccines expressed by your staff and residents/family members? And how did you address those concerns?

West Ridge: Infertility, not enough time to test the vaccine, side effects, we addressed all the concerns by providing two physicians' question and answer sessions.





Jill Hines

"At the time the vaccine was made available to me, I was about 3 months pregnant. It was a decision I didn't take lightly. In the end I decided to get the vaccine because I knew that's what was best to protect my home and my work family." — Jill Hines, RN, MDS Coordinator, and Children

22

West Ridge Care Center

Question: How did you engage your staff in the development of your COVID-19 plan?

West Ridge: Weekly COVID support meetings, asking what concerns they had, what's keeping them up at night, and what do they need at home. Some staff needed help with daycare for the first year of the pandemic, so we helped some find day care and for others we adjusted their schedules to work with them. As a facility we've been through a war together, cried, laughed, but now emerging through the other side stronger.

Question: Did you provide incentives for getting the vaccine? If so, what were they?

West Ridge: No- The love for the residents was the driving force.

Question: How did you provide education about COVID and vaccinations to your staff, residents, and family members?

West Ridge: Weekly COVID support groups, Iowa Health Care Association (IHCA), CMS weekly informational calls. We listen to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), Iowa Department of Public Health (IDPH). Local County Public Health (LCPH) and the hospital had support calls monthly. We relayed the info to our staff, families, residents via zoom, calls, emails, meetings, and bulletins.

Question: Who do you think are the most trusted sources of information on COVID for your staff?

West Ridge: Iowa Health Care Association (IHCA), our trade association, was a huge assist for updated knowledge of best practices in our state and across the country. The calls/ zooms continue monthly now.

Question: Do you think peer pressure on either side of the decision was a big factor to contend with?

West Ridge: We feel the relationships were a factor in staff and residents' decision to get vaccinated. Our relationships built at West Ridge drive our culture. Maybe not peer pressure but all-around trust.

Question: How important was a safe work environment to your staff?

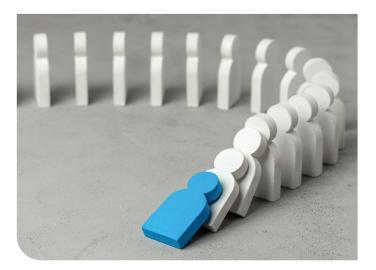
West Ridge: Safety is #1 for the staff and residents alike.

Question: Were there some workers more hesitant than others (CNAs vs Nurses vs Dietary vs Administration)?

West Ridge: Staff were scared for themselves and loved ones but with processes, we made sure all staff felt comfortable in the decision to get vaccinated. Yes, our dietary department was a bit more apprehensive. Some of this had to do with the age of that department, being a younger demographic.

Question: What is the most valuable advice you can offer other nursing home providers in lowa on vaccine mandates and/or how to protect those entrusted to their care and staff?

West Ridge: Education, reassurance, and to trust science. We were able to create a domino effect in the willingness to get vaccinated. We simply took a leap of faith in saying to work in this industry protecting seniors should be our priority.



Question: Did you need to adjust your plan when the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) announced vaccine mandates for all Medicare and Medicaid certified facilities or providers?

West Ridge: Due to the CMS guidance, it simplified the onboarding process because health care workers typically understand now that if they choose to continue in the health care industry they must be vaccinated.

Question: How do you intend to maintain the 100% vaccination rate?

West Ridge: We intend to continue our quest of saving our seniors through the same process that drove our initial campaign. That putting trust in science, education, and taking the time to learn about everyone's apprehension while supporting them one on one will be an ongoing process for some time.

Question: In the end was it the right decision?

West Ridge: Yes, since we have been 100% vaccinated, we have seen staff and residents with break-through COVID cases. However, there has been such a difference in the spell of illness with much milder signs and symptoms, shorter periods of illness and most importantly zero loss of life, THIS ... solidifying our decision to mandate the COVID-19 vaccination for our staff. It truly has saved lives and that was our #1 priority.

We are grateful to West Ridge Care Center for sharing their story and congratulate them on their success! West Ridge Care Center is a 58-bed facility in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. The services they provide include, long-term care, skilled nursing facility, hospice, memory care, and respite.

https://westridgecarecenter.com/

TAKE TIME AND USE INTERPRETERS IN COMMUNICATING WITH NON-ENGLISH-SPEAKING INDIVIDUALS ABOUT COVID-19 AND VACCINATIONS



Brittany worked as a Certified Nursing Assistant for fifteen years before becoming a Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN) and is continuing her schooling to become a Registered Nurse. In her past and current work experience she has worked with many non-English-speaking patients or residents and learned some lessons along the way.

Brittany Steffens, LPN

Question: As a former CNA and now a nurse who has worked with people of many different cultures, are those individuals hesitant to get a COVID-19 vaccination? And if so, why?

Brittany: People from other cultures struggle with how the information about the COVID-19 vaccine is dispersed. I have taken the time to answer many questions with an interpreter present to help patients understand, and answer concerns they may have about getting the vaccination. A lot of people from different cultures do not know the resources or may not have them available in a language that they understand.

Many of you have already overcome so much to be in this country, so don't let health care be a barrier for you.

Question: What advice would you share with those who may not have experience working with non-English-speaking individuals in addressing their concerns about COVID vaccinations?

Brittany: One important thing to remember, which I know has been difficult with staffing shortages, is to take that extra time to listen, and use an interpreter. Some of our patients won't use an interpreter because of the charges that come with it. As a nurse, I explain that using an interpreter is important so they understand everything about their health care and so I understand them. Imagine being frightened about getting COVID-19 and the vaccination. Imagine you or a loved one becomes very ill with COVID and you are unable to understand what's being said or done to you or your loved one in a hospital, clinic, or long-term care.

Question: What would you like to say to non-English-speaking individuals about COVID-19 vaccinations?

Brittany: Take the time to ask all the questions you need to better understand the COVID-19 vaccination and YOUR care. Many of you have already overcome so much to be in this country, so don't let health care be a barrier for you. Get the vaccine for yourself, your family, and your friends.

Translated Versions of the Hub

To ensure that those for whom English is not their first language, the Hub will be translated for Arabic, Bosnian, Burmese, French, Spanish, and Vietnamese speaking people. The links to those publications will soon be posted on our website. www.iowacaregivers.org and distributed electronically by Iowa CareGivers, Iowa Department of Human Rights, and other partners.



ADDRESSING COVID VACCINE CONCERNS OF PEOPLE OF COLOR



Dr. Akinola is a Board-Certified Family Physician and a Senior Partner with Sound Physicians at Mercy Medical Center, Cedar Rapids, Iowa where he has been practicing as a Hospitalist since 2013. His practice entails about 3,000 patient encounters per year, a significant portion of which have been COVID patients over the past few years.

Question: I'm a black woman who works as an aide in a hospital. I've read the stories from the 1930s about the Tuskegee Study when black men were used in research without their knowing it. So even after all these years, I don't have a lot of trust in the system or politicians. I wish I knew who to trust because I worry about my elderly mother who lives with us and is in poor health. I don't want to harm those I take care of at work or my mother. What can you say that will restore my trust and faith in a system that has failed us in the past?

Dr. Akinola: The burden of the painful parts of our history as a country cannot be denied, but neither can we deny that a pandemic is a global health crisis. That leaves us as humans of all shades and sizes in need of a solution. It is worth noting that the large-scale research that has gone into the development of COVID vaccines by several companies around the world has involved scientists of color, at the very highest levels. More importantly, millions of lives have been saved from hospitalization and death by these vaccines.

I may not be able to particularly restore one individual's trust in the healthcare system, but it is very true that to the extent that COVID-19 has been a drowning problem for every human being, the vaccines have been a very helpful lifeline.

Question: I'm frustrated with the whole thing. At first, I tried to keep up with the different guidelines and recommendations, but they changed so often it made me doubt whether the experts even knew what they were talking about. It was so rushed, and I am afraid that if I get vaccinated that they may find some serious side effect after I get the shot. Are they safe considering how rushed they have been?

Dr. Akinola: What has caused your frustration is not unique to you. Please understand that science works by observation, experimentation, and validation of our findings. The inconsistency that has defined the public health guidelines were caused by the unfolding revelations as this vicious virus kept mutating and spreading wildly. Add to that millions of deaths around the world, which put the emergent nature of the problem on steroids. Half a loaf, they say, is better than none. Whatever prevents death has to be better than death.

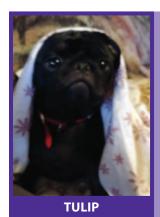
Rather than question the motives of those who stand at the forefront of finding solutions so we can go back to normal life, I suggest we should use what information we have to keep ourselves and our society safe.

Question: There are certain underlying health conditions that people of color have a predisposition to. Does that increase our risks for more serious side effects from the vaccines than others?

Dr. Akinola: Thanks for the important point you raised in your question. Yes, black people are more prone than our white brothers and sisters to have hypertension, diabetes, renal failure etc. That, however, is exactly why we should embrace the lifeline of vaccines against COVID. While vaccines have been shown to have a few notable side-effects in extremely few people, there are hundreds of thousands of people in their graves today who would be alive if they had the OPPORTUNITY to receive a vaccination against the virus.

To your question, you are not at increased risk for side-effects of the vaccines but for hospitalization and possible death from severe disease if you were to get COVID while unvaccinated.

Pets Parting Advice



"SOMETIMES WE FEEL SAD BUT HELP IS THERE"

FOR COUNSELING/MENTAL HEALTH: Iowa Concern Hotline: 800.447.1985 Iowa Warm Line: 844.775.9276 Spanish Line: 531.800.3687 Covid Recovery Iowa: www.covidrecoveryiowa.org Your Life Iowa: https://yourlifeiowa.org



0 W

In loving memory of Autumn who passed in

February. Thanks to our four-legged pets and friends for their contributions to the Hub.



Washing our hands and our physical health are very important but so is our mental health. If my humans need a snuggle, I'm there for them in a heartbeat! Let's all be there for each other!



Do What I do... I Take Time to Smell the Flowers and Other Things I Like to Sniff! Sometimes I sneak things that I like to sniff into the house and hide them. The odor serves as a diversion to my stressed-out humans and for a little while they are focused on something other than work and the news. It's fun watching them which is also good for my mental health.

We as pets have also been impacted by the pandemic. We hope all humans will get vaccinated so we can all get back to:



Long Nature Hikes Together and Good Head Scratches



Squirrel Watching in the Back Yard and Snuggling



Throwing the Ball in the Back Yard and Snuggles with My Favorite Blanket



Treeing Squirrels and Evening Treats





Centers for Disease Control (CDC) https://tinyurl.com/bdfd475h



Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) https://www.cms.gov/ COVID-19 Resources

https://tinyurl.com/54e4mmsu



Iowa Department of Public Health (IDPH) https://idph.iowa.gov/ Vaccine Information https://tinyurl.com/2avr2adc COVID-19 Reporting https://tinyurl.com/2p8dxz6b



FOR THOSE IN DIRECT CARE TO BE:

PREPARED | CONNECTED | INFORMED | EMPOWERED

WHAT'S SO Special ABOUT IOWA CAREGIVERS?

IOWA CAREGIVERS (IC) began in 1992 in the basement of a former nurse aide. IC is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization devoted to sharing the independent voice of those in direct care. We strive to elevate the direct care workforce through programs and advocacy that will result in society placing a higher value on those who provide direct care; increase wages, and education and training that is consistent with a permanent record and credentials or certifications that follow you from one workplace setting or population served to another.

"WE'VE GOT YOUR BACKS AND YOUR BEST INTERESTS at heart!"

Sign up NOW! Complete the form on our website at www.iowacaregivers.org. You can also sign up by phone or request a form at 515.223.2805 or by email at information@iowacaregivers.org.

Receive up-to-date information about educational programs, direct care news, networking and other opportunities!

Iowa CareGivers 939 Office Park Road #332 West Des Moines, Iowa 50265



NONPROFIT ORGANIZATION U.S. POSTAGE PAID DES MOINES, IA PERMIT NO. 5294

IOWA CAREGIVERS' DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION STATEMENT

The lowa CareGivers strives to be a model of diversity, equity, and inclusion in all aspects of our work. This statement was adopted by the Board of Directors We seek to represent and advocate for the many caregivers who proudly work in our state, and we value and promote inclusiveness in all aspects of our work. The organization employs and promotes individuals, recruits volunteers, and partners with programs that inclusively support the diversity of our state.

In all levels of staff and governance, the lowa CareGivers is dedicated to greater diversity within the organization and to providing equal opportunity to people, without regard to race, religion, skin color, gender, national origin, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, physical or mental abilities, genetic information, pregnancy, disability, age, family or marital status, veteran status and socio-economic status or other characteristics protected by applicable law.

We believe that each caregiver, donor, volunteer, advocate, and employee must have equal access to addressing our issues. We recognize that we have the role, responsibility, and opportunity to partner across organizations throughout the state to close equity gaps.

Make sure to visit us on the web at: www.iowacaregivers.org and follow us on Facebook and Twitter

Ň

Please remember to update us if you have any name or contact information changes, so that you can continue to receive the Iowa CareGivers HUB and other program announcements. Thank you.

lowa CareGivers does not discriminate in its educational programs and activities on the basis of race, creed, national origin, ancestry, color, religion, sex, age, disability, veteran status, sexual orientation or any other protected class under relevant state and federal laws.