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 **Collaborative Effort Uncovers Critical Issues in Nebraska Communities Compounded by COVID-19**

***Food insecurity, healthcare supplies, inadequate technology, and childcare shortage top list***

(LINCOLN) – Dozens of Nebraska organizations asked communities across the state what they need right now during the pandemic. They discovered that many communities are experiencing critical issues with regard to food, health care, child care and adequate technology.

In response to the COVID-19 outbreak, Bring Up Nebraska partners – communities, nonprofits, state, and local government agencies – have collaborated to create “playbooks” to help articulate the emergent needs of Nebraskans. These playbooks serve as a summary of needs and allow communities to identify gaps in services, develop plans, coordinate activities, and respond quickly to the needs of youth and families across the state.

With First Lady Susanne Shore as its ardent champion, Bring Up Nebraska aims to give local communities the ability to develop long-term plans using the latest strategies and data to prevent life’s challenges from becoming crises for Nebraska families.

The Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) will incorporate information from Bring Up Nebraska and affiliated partners to develop tools and resources to support children and families. Children and Family Services Director Stephanie Beasley believes this partnership will continue to strengthen the child welfare system throughout Nebraska. “In developing these playbooks Bring Up Nebraska is further continuing its commitment to support child welfare partners in the state,” she said.

Nebraska Children and Families Foundation Senior Vice President Jennifer Skala also commented on the renewed commitment saying, “We knew the best way to truly help communities was to understand their needs. We created this playbook to initiate those conversations. Every community across the state has its own unique challenges and we must listen and act to address them. The response to the playbook has been overwhelming. The stories we are hearing are truly heart-wrenching, but we’ve been buoyed by the response from communities to come together to help their neighbors.”

Development of these playbooks is spearheaded by Bring Up Nebraska, a community-led effort developed by Nebraska Children and Families Foundation to bring in critical players to collaborate on efforts to provide prevention support to families. Under the Bring Up Nebraska umbrella, there are 16 autonomous collaboratives serving 50 of Nebraska’s counties. In addition, Bring Up Nebraska is working with local Educational Service Units and existing collaborative leaders to cover an additional 31 counties in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Along with the public partners, several private funders have provided funds to the collaboratives to meet the emergency needs in their communities: Nebraska Impact COVID-19 Relief Fund, The Sherwood Foundation, William and Ruth Scott Family Foundation, and the Claire M. Hubbard Foundation.

To assist with the COVID-19 response, Bring Up Nebraska is using the playbooks to help guide partners at the state and local level in addressing COVID-19-related issues. Among the collaborative solutions being implemented:

* The **Nebraska Child Care Referral Network** at [www.nechildcarereferral.org](http://www.nechildcarereferral.org) was launched last week. The site provides parents a database where childcare providers and essential workers can match openings in licensed care centers.
* Money raised through the [Nebraska Impact COVID-19 Relief Fund](https://neimpact.org/) has been directed to the community collaboratives in **Dakota, Madison, Hall and Dawson counties to ease food challenges**.
* The Nebraska Department of Education (NDE) worked with the U.S. Department of Education, the USDA, and school districts to **secure waivers to federal school lunch programs**. Those waivers allowed schools to provide lunches to their students even though they were not attending classes in the building due to the COVID-19 outbreak. Schools across the state have delivered thousands of meals to students in need.
* One of the biggest challenges facing schools during the pandemic has been equity. The NDE and community collaboratives within the Bring Up Nebraska initiative have worked with technology partners to **bring internet and devices to families without access**. With children no longer able to attend class in person, the disparity between children with adequate technology and internet access and those without needed to be addressed to ensure equitable educational opportunities and outcomes.
* As part of the Department of Health and Human Services response to COVID-19, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) **recipients received maximum allotments for the months of March and April**. SNAP recipients have their benefits calculated on a scale with the maximum set by how many members are in the household. This change allowed all SNAP recipients to receive the maximum allotment based on the number of people in their household. Also, as part of a partnership between the USDA and the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), **SNAP recipients are able order groceries online from Amazon** and pay with their EBT cards. Families who did not qualify for SNAP but still had food security issues were then referred to their local collaborative, where flexible funds could be used to help them meet their needs.

Guidance from DHHS can be found [here](http://dhhs.ne.gov/Pages/Coronavirus.aspx) and from NDE [here](https://www.education.ne.gov/publichealth/resources/). For a full range of the needs expressed by communities, as well as proposed solutions and strategies already underway, the playbooks from Bring Up Nebraska can be found [here.](http://www.bringupnebraska.org/tools-resources)

The collaborative infrastructure created through Bring Up Nebraska and its community partners are proving to be an efficient means of gathering people together to solve the challenges in their community and help families stay safe and healthy.

“While the collaboratives were not created specifically to address emergency situations, the collaborative infrastructure created in communities has proven to be an effective means of supporting families through disasters as well as providing resources to keep families safe and healthy in the long term,” said Skala.

**How You Can Help**

While the community collaborative infrastructure is in place in a majority of communities across the state, much support is still needed. Bring Up Nebraska is a call-to-action asking people to get involved with their local collaborative to help fulfil the needs so many are facing. More information on how to find your local collaborative or ways to support families in your community can be found at [www.BringUpNebraska.org](http://www.BringUpNebraska.org).

**About Bring Up Nebraska**
Bring Up Nebraska is a community-led effort with a unique approach to prevention services – instead of the usual "top down" approach. Communities have the best understanding of their own needs and resources. By working in community collaboratives, LOCAL partners identify and coordinate resources in new ways for affordability and sustainability. The focus of Bring Up Nebraska is on building the community's capacity to solve its own problems and be accountable to each other.

In addition to community collaboratives across the state, partners include: DHHS, Nebraska Department of Education; Nebraska Children and Families Foundation, Department of Labor, Department of Economic Development, Nebraska Emergency Management Agency (NEMA), and Nebraska Investment Finance Authority (NIFA), Center for the Study of Social Policy, Nebraska Child Abuse Prevention Fund Board, Administrative Office of Probation, Casey Family Programs, and the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

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