



Connecting Science to Communities

2026 Legislative Candidate Guide

Our Process

In June, Nebraska Cures sent all legislative candidates a questionnaire asking for their views on a variety of research issues. Responses were accepted through mid-August and compiled into this document.

Our Questions

A. The State of Nebraska funds biomedical research at its public institutions, including UNMC, UNO, UNL UNK, Creighton University, and Boys Town National Research Hospital. In fiscal year 2026-27, state funding for biomedical research was cut by \$5 million, with attempts to cut it further.

Do you support state funding for biomedical research at Nebraska's research institutions?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Unsure/Need more information

In light of recent cuts, would you support restoring or increasing state investment in biomedical research?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Unsure/Need more information

B. Nebraska's Department of Health and Human Services maintains databases and registries that researchers and public health experts rely on to prevent, treat, and cure disease. Timely access to this data is essential to advancing medical research.

Do you support ensuring qualified researchers have timely access to public health data?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Unsure/Need more information

C. In 2008 the Nebraska Legislature passed LB 606, a compromise bill pertaining to embryonic stem cell research being done at UNMC. LB 606 allows UNMC researchers to continue to do research on embryonic stem cells using federally approved cell lines, however, no state funds and facilities can be used to destroy or create an embryo for the purpose of research. The legislation also encouraged scientists to pursue research projects using non-embryonic stem cells and appropriated up to \$500,000 in state funds as matching funds each year for non-embryonic stem cell research projects. This law is still in effect.

Do you support existing state law?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Unsure/Need more information

D. Nebraska research institutions study the health impacts of extreme weather events, including droughts, floods, and heat — conditions that have been linked to food insecurity, infectious disease, and adverse mental health outcomes.

Do you support state investment in research that helps Nebraska prepare for and respond to extreme weather events?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Unsure/Need more information

E. Mental health and substance use disorders are among the most pressing public health challenges facing Nebraska. Access to prevention, treatment, and recovery services varies widely across the state.

How would you prioritize mental health and substance use prevention and treatment funding in the state budget?

F. Scientific and medical research conducted in Nebraska contributes to job creation, economic development, and improved health outcomes for all Nebraskans. Do you believe state investment in scientific and medical research is important to Nebraska's future?

G. Any final thoughts you would like to share about these and other critical public health issues?

District 2

(Cass and Lancaster Counties)

Caitlin Knutson

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A. Do you support state funding for biomedical research at Nebraska's research institutions? **YES**

In light of recent cuts, would you support restoring or increasing state investment in biomedical research? **YES**

B. Do you support ensuring qualified researchers have timely access to public health data? **YES**

C. Do you support the existing compromise allowing for embryonic stem cell research on existing, federally approved stem cell lines? **YES**

D. Do you support state investment in research that helps Nebraska prepare for and respond to extreme weather events? **YES**

E. How would you prioritize mental health and substance use prevention and treatment funding in the state budget? **I support funding DHHS, and am weary of any attempts to balance the budget by making cuts to this area of the budget. Having worked in DHHS, I think there are cases where money could be better allocated and planned for, but any attempts to cut funds risks cutting essential services that can severely hurt our most vulnerable populations.**

What barriers do you see to Nebraskans accessing mental health care, and what role should the state play in addressing them? **It is difficult for the state to attract and retain qualified mental health therapists, particularly in rural areas. I support tuition reimbursement and/or grants to encourage people to enter the field, stay in the field, and work in rural areas. As well, it is difficult to find private practitioners who provide sliding scale fees. I support funding Medicaid to provide access to care to lower income earners and those without insurance.**

F. Do you believe state investment in scientific and medical research is important to Nebraska's future? **YES**

G. Any final thoughts you would like to share about these any other critical public health issues?

In addition to my time working for DHHS, my family works in medicine as well. My husband is a paramedic with Lincoln Fire and Rescue, my father is a retired internist with the VA, and my mother is a retired OB nurse, who finished her career doing clinical research for the Women's Clinic in Lincoln. I support science, science funding, and access to care.

Dean Helmick - No Response to survey.

District 4

(West-central Omaha and Elkhorn, Douglas County)

Brad von Gillern

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A. Do you support state funding for biomedical research at Nebraska's research institutions? **NO**

In light of recent cuts, would you support restoring or increasing state investment in biomedical research? **YES**

B. Do you support ensuring qualified researchers have timely access to public health data? **YES**

C. Do you support the existing compromise allowing for embryonic stem cell research on existing, federally approved stem cell lines? **YES**

D. Do you support state investment in research that helps Nebraska prepare for and respond to extreme weather events? **YES**

E. How would you prioritize mental health and substance use prevention and treatment funding in the state budget?

Investing in mental health and substance abuse prevention and treatment not only results in improved outcomes for our citizens, but it is a good financial investment. The cost of leaving these matters untreated is dramatically higher than investing in prevention and dealing with these matters as early as possible.

What barriers do you see to Nebraskans accessing mental health care, and what role should the state play in addressing them?

Lack of mental health providers is a huge barrier, as is simply navigating the system to find a provider. It can become a seemingly hopeless situation for individuals and families in crisis when they are told it will take months to get help.

F. Do you believe state investment in scientific and medical research is important to Nebraska's future? **YES**

G. Any final thoughts you would like to share about these any other critical public health issues?

I am pleased and proud to have worked with Nebraska Cures to help with legislative matters over these past (nearly) four years. Thank you for all that you do, I will be alongside to do all that I can to preserve funding and invest in improved outcomes for Nebraskans.

Cindy Maxwell-Ostediek

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A. Do you support state funding for biomedical research at Nebraska's research institutions? **YES**

In light of recent cuts, would you support restoring or increasing state investment in biomedical research? **YES**

B. Do you support ensuring qualified researchers have timely access to public health data? **YES**

C. Do you support the existing compromise allowing for embryonic stem cell research on existing, federally approved stem cell lines? **YES**

D. Do you support state investment in research that helps Nebraska prepare for and respond to extreme weather events? **YES**

E. How would you prioritize mental health and substance use prevention and treatment funding in the state budget?

Investments in mental health are the right thing to do and fiscally responsible. These are public safety issues and should be prioritized in the budget as such. At the same time, the more investments that we make into prevention, the less we have to spend on treatment on the back end. I will be a vote to increase prevention, treatment, and recovery funding for both mental health and substance use disorder funding. We know that these programs work and increased access to mental health and addiction resources improves our state in many regards, including public safety and economic growth. I am committed to working with local communities to see what gaps exist and how the state can help fill those gaps.

What barriers do you see to Nebraskans accessing mental health care, and what role should the state play in addressing them?

The state needs to work to bring down the cost of treatment in our communities. Many who are dealing with mental health and substance use disorders are not in a financial situation that allows them to access care, but getting them treatment saves the state money in the long run.

F. Do you believe state investment in scientific and medical research is important to Nebraska's future? **YES**

G. Any final thoughts you would like to share about these any other critical public health issues?

Thank you for the chance to participate in your questionnaire! I believe we need to follow the science and stand up against the attacks we are seeing on public health, whether it is cuts to coverage, research, reimbursement rates, or attempts to spread misinformation. These are issues that affect every single resident and there is much more we can do to increase access to affordable healthcare. I look forward to working with trusted experts, such as your organization, to ensure Nebraskans have access to the care they deserve.

District 6

(Omaha, Douglas County)

Patrick Leahy

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A. Do you support state funding for biomedical research at Nebraska's research institutions? **YES**

In light of recent cuts, would you support restoring or increasing state investment in biomedical research? **YES**

B. Do you support ensuring qualified researchers have timely access to public health data? **YES**

C. Do you support the existing compromise allowing for embryonic stem cell research on existing, federally approved stem cell lines? **YES**

D. Do you support state investment in research that helps Nebraska prepare for and respond to extreme weather events? **YES**

E. How would you prioritize mental health and substance use prevention and treatment funding in the state budget? **It is critical that all communities have access to resources needed to address mental health and substance use disorders. Preventative treatment and recovery services are good investments because they save us money on the back end, both in our criminal justice systems and public health systems. I am less familiar with the need in rural communities, although I am sure that there are many gaps to fill, more so than in Lincoln or Omaha, where the need is still critical. I am committed to working with healthcare providers and local communities to determine what their needs are and then the appropriations committee to ensure we are making investments in these areas.**

What barriers do you see to Nebraskans accessing mental health care, and what role should the state play in addressing them? **The availability of care in their community, the affordability of such care, and stigma around receiving care are all prominent issues. The state needs to work to attract more providers to keep rates affordable. I believe the state could play a role regarding the stigma issue working with providers and nonprofits on public communication campaigns.**

F. Do you believe state investment in scientific and medical research is important to Nebraska's future? **YES**

G. Any final thoughts you would like to share about these any other critical public health issues? **I appreciate the opportunity to participate in the questionnaire process and all the advocacy work you do for important scientific issues for our state. Overall, affordable and accessible public healthcare should always be one of our government's top priorities. I plan to work on these issues because I know how it really affects the middle and working class, who I will unapologetically aim to represent in the Legislature. You will also find me always in support of science and data, which shows that a healthier community is a safer and more prosperous one. I look forward to working with subject matter experts on these issues to make the best decisions for the future of our state!**

Nate Ost diek - No response to survey.

District 8

(Omaha, Douglas County)

Erin Feichtinger & Josh Livingston

No Response to survey

District 10

(Northwest Omaha, Douglas County)

Cindy Johnson

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A. Do you support state funding for biomedical research at Nebraska's research institutions? **YES**

In light of recent cuts, would you support restoring or increasing state investment in biomedical research? **YES**

B. Do you support ensuring qualified researchers have timely access to public health data? **YES**

C. Do you support the existing compromise allowing for embryonic stem cell research on existing, federally approved stem cell lines? **YES**

D. Do you support state investment in research that helps Nebraska prepare for and respond to extreme weather events? **YES**

E. How would you prioritize mental health and substance use prevention and treatment funding in the state budget? **I know that properly funding mental healthcare and substance use prevention and treatment is a necessity to reduce harms down the road and get folks the care they need *when they need it*. As a Doctor of Audiology and someone who has worked closely with veterans, this issue is very important to me. I know first-hand the barriers that often stand in the way of someone seeking care, and I want to work with organizations like yours to address them. These are policies that health care professionals, law enforcement, and everyday Nebraskans support; it's time we prioritize them. I'll stand in support of measures that fund mental healthcare and substance use prevention and treatment across Nebraska.**

What barriers do you see to Nebraskans accessing mental health care, and what role should the state play in addressing them? **From my experience as an audiologist, I know that the biggest challenge in parts of Nebraska is finding a qualified professional who can perform the services we need. I have seen the difference in access to care from Norfolk to Omaha to rural Nebraska. If we do not have providers across the state or within a reasonable driving distance, we will not meet the moment. I have worked with young professionals who are trying to find a place to start their career and their family. Nebraska can step up to the plate and provide meaningful incentives for these professionals to care for patients in these high-need**

areas. The other obvious barrier is cost. There are so many residents who want care, but are afraid of the bill that may come with it. We need to lower costs and increase cost transparency so there are no surprises.

F. Do you believe state investment in scientific and medical research is important to Nebraska's future? **YES**

G. Any final thoughts you would like to share about these any other critical public health issues?

As a provider, I've advocated on behalf of my profession and my patients at the Legislature and across all levels of government - including lobbying for requiring hearing screening for newborns and insurance coverage of hearing devices for children in the State. I am a strong supporter of any measures that improve public health and I will always advocate for more funding for research and access to programs that make Nebraska healthier.

Rebecca Rens - No response to survey

District 12

(Ralston and South-Central Omaha, Douglas County)

Merv Riep

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A. Do you support state funding for biomedical research at Nebraska's research institutions? **YES**

In light of recent cuts, would you support restoring or increasing state investment in biomedical research? **Unsure/Need more information**

B. Do you support ensuring qualified researchers have timely access to public health data? **YES**

C. Do you support the existing compromise allowing for embryonic stem cell research on existing, federally approved stem cell lines? **YES**

D. Do you support state investment in research that helps Nebraska prepare for and respond to extreme weather events? **Unsure/Need more information**

E. How would you prioritize mental health and substance use prevention and treatment funding in the state budget? **Need regional planning of mental health care services.**

What barriers do you see to Nebraskans accessing mental health care, and what role should the state play in addressing them? **Needless duplication**

F. Do you believe state investment in scientific and medical research is important Nebraska's future? **YES**

G. Any final thoughts you would like to share about these any other critical public health issues?

Need to consolidate federal health care delivery model (e.g., the federal Veterans' Health Care Systems needs to be merged into federal Medicare.)



Christy Knorr

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A. Do you support state funding for biomedical research at Nebraska's research institutions? **YES**

In light of recent cuts, would you support restoring or increasing state investment in biomedical research? **YES**

B. Do you support ensuring qualified researchers have timely access to public health data? **YES**

C. Do you support the existing compromise allowing for embryonic stem cell research on existing, federally approved stem cell lines? **YES**

D. Do you support state investment in research that helps Nebraska prepare for and respond to extreme weather events? **YES**

E. How would you prioritize mental health and substance use prevention and treatment funding in the state budget?

I feel like we are seeing more mental health struggle and crisis across the state. I know that I have had to reach out for help when I did not have any insurance and was not working. Thankfully I found someone who was willing to see me at a discounted rate. This should not be the norm. We also need to discuss that housing, food, medical care, and a living wage are part of mental health as well. We need to stop criminalizing addiction.

What barriers do you see to Nebraskans accessing mental health care, and what role should the state play in addressing them?

This is a big one. There is so much. Not enough providers, unable to afford access or visits due to lack of medical coverage, shame related to accessing mental health care, and being just unsure of how to ask for help. I see providers who do not prioritize mental health and do not ask the necessary questions just to check in to make sure their patients are okay.

F. Do you believe state investment in scientific and medical research is important to Nebraska's future? **YES**

G. Any final thoughts you would like to share about these any other critical public health issues?

Stem cell research should be expanded here in NE. There are so many issues that are detrimental to our public health here in NE. I am also concerned about increased cancer rates that we are seeing due to nitrates, poor water quality, and pesticides.

District 14

(La Vista and Papillion, Sarpy County)

SuAnn Witt

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A. Do you support state funding for biomedical research at Nebraska's research institutions? **YES**

In light of recent cuts, would you support restoring or increasing state investment in biomedical research? **YES**

B. Do you support ensuring qualified researchers have timely access to public health data? **YES**

C. Do you support the existing compromise allowing for embryonic stem cell research on existing, federally approved stem cell lines? **YES**

D. Do you support state investment in research that helps Nebraska prepare for and respond to extreme weather events? **YES**

E. How would you prioritize mental health and substance use prevention and treatment funding in the state budget?

Mental health and substance use prevention are key to public safety. These issues can compound on themselves and become a much larger problem if not addressed promptly. One year without the proper services in place can lead to a much longer recovery period for people and more expenses in the criminal justice system. The key here is prevention. One year without proper services in place means years of consequences. We need to ensure these services are prioritized in the legislature for the safety of those with these issues, as well as the safety of the public.

What barriers do you see to Nebraskans accessing mental health care, and what role should the state play in addressing them?

There are barriers to accessing mental health care in schools in particular. We should do what we can to support these services within schools themselves, where students would have the greatest opportunity to take advantage of that care. I also believe that, while it is becoming more commonplace, there is still a stigma around seeking mental health care. The more we can do to reduce that stigma, the more likely someone who needs the services will seek them out. Everyone from our teachers, to law enforcement, to mental health professionals agrees that we need more funding for this care. In the Legislature, I am committed to reducing these barriers and expanding access to affordable healthcare.

F. Do you believe state investment in scientific and medical research is important to Nebraska's future? **YES**

G. Any final thoughts you would like to share about these any other critical public health issues?

The public health issues we face in Nebraska are not entirely dissimilar to those we face across the United States. From mental health, reproductive care, heart disease, or cancer, we need robust resources and funding for research to support these important causes. All of these issues are interconnected, and we need policies that raise the tide for all boats. There are also clear causes and effects between low-income communities and a lack of access to affordable healthcare. People can not work if they or their family is sick, and they can not build a better life if they are crippled with medical debt. In addition, Nebraska, especially in rural counties, faces a shortage of primary care physicians. This, combined with the rising costs of healthcare present a problem with access to care. As legislators, we need to do everything we can to drive down costs associated with healthcare while preserving the quality of care. By increasing Medicaid reimbursement costs from the state, we can ease the burden on hospitals across the state and help prevent them from having to close their doors or eliminate key services. The UNMC system is consistently ranked in the highest tier for primary care in the United States, and the collaboration with the State of Nebraska is very important to maintaining that status.

Bill Bowes - No response to survey

District 16

(Burt, Cumming, Stanton, and Washington Counties)

Ted Japp

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A. Do you support state funding for biomedical research at Nebraska's research institutions? **YES**

In light of recent cuts, would you support restoring or increasing state investment in biomedical research? **Unsure/Need more information**

B. Do you support ensuring qualified researchers have timely access to public health data? **Unsure/need more information**

C. Do you support the existing compromise allowing for embryonic stem cell research on existing, federally approved stem cell lines? **Unsure/Need more information**

D. Do you support state investment in research that helps Nebraska prepare for and respond to extreme weather events? **YES**

E. How would you prioritize mental health and substance use prevention and treatment funding in the state budget? **Good mental health is synonymous with overall good health. You cannot have one without the other. Efforts should be made to budget money for mental health.**

What barriers do you see to Nebraskans accessing mental health care, and what role should the state play in addressing them? **My son has severe autism and other mental health spectrum disorders. We have had**

difficulty in the past finding in-patient care for him due to lack of available beds. If possible, the state should allocate resources to help alleviate the shortage. The big roadblock is obviously available funding to do so.

F. Do you believe state investment in scientific and medical research is important to Nebraska's future? **YES**

G. Any final thoughts you would like to share about these any other critical public health issues? **N/A**

Cindy Chatt - No response to survey

District 18

(Bennington and Northwest Omaha, Douglas County)

Taylor Royal

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A. Do you support state funding for biomedical research at Nebraska's research institutions? **YES**

In light of recent cuts, would you support restoring or increasing state investment in biomedical research? **YES**

B. Do you support ensuring qualified researchers have timely access to public health data? **YES**

C. Do you support the existing compromise allowing for embryonic stem cell research on existing, federally approved stem cell lines? **YES**

D. Do you support state investment in research that helps Nebraska prepare for and respond to extreme weather events? **YES**

E. How would you prioritize mental health and substance use prevention and treatment funding in the state budget? **Given my professional background, I look at state funding through the lens of stewardship for taxpayers and long-term return on investment. We should prioritize mental health and substance use prevention because it's a compassionate service for Nebraskans and fiscally responsible. Failure to invest in these critical initiatives lead to higher downstream social costs. I favor investment that has defined goals and measurable outcomes.**

What barriers do you see to Nebraskans accessing mental health care, and what role should the state play in addressing them? **In speaking with care professionals, I believe workforce shortages and regulatory burden are barriers to care. We can partner with our universities to build stronger workforce pipelines, expand telehealth initiatives, and cut unnecessary regulatory burden.**

F. Do you believe state investment in scientific and medical research is important to Nebraska's future? **YES**

G. Any final thoughts you would like to share about these any other critical public health issues?

Public health policy is paramount to strong families, safe neighborhoods, and thriving communities. These issues are all interconnected with good tax and regulatory policy, investments in our social programs, and strengthening our support for our first responders.

Jess Goldoni - No response to survey

District 20

(Omaha and Central Douglas County, Douglas County)

Josh Fredrickson

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A. Do you support state funding for biomedical research at Nebraska's research institutions? **YES**

In light of recent cuts, would you support restoring or increasing state investment in biomedical research? **YES**

B. Do you support ensuring qualified researchers have timely access to public health data? **YES**

C. Do you support the existing compromise allowing for embryonic stem cell research on existing, federally approved stem cell lines? **YES**

D. Do you support state investment in research that helps Nebraska prepare for and respond to extreme weather events? **YES**

E. How would you prioritize mental health and substance use prevention and treatment funding in the state budget? **During my first term I have been a strong advocate for evidence-based approaches and funding for mental health and substance use disorders. I will continue to pursue legislation and funding for these important services throughout the state.**

What barriers do you see to Nebraskans accessing mental health care, and what role should the state play in addressing them? **Workforce shortages, healthcare deserts, provider rates not meeting cost of delivery. State needs to prioritize these issues and invest in infrastructure.**

F. Do you believe state investment in scientific and medical research is important to Nebraska's future? **YES**

G. Any final thoughts you would like to share about these any other critical public health issues?
I appreciate your work and look forward to continuing to collaborate.

Chris Anderson

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A. Do you support state funding for biomedical research at Nebraska's research institutions? **YES**

In light of recent cuts, would you support restoring or increasing state investment in biomedical research? **Unsure/Need more information**

B. Do you support ensuring qualified researchers have timely access to public health data? **YES**

C. Do you support the existing compromise allowing for embryonic stem cell research on existing, federally approved stem cell lines? **Unsure/Need more information**

D. Do you support state investment in research that helps Nebraska prepare for and respond to extreme weather events? **YES**

E. How would you prioritize mental health and substance use prevention and treatment funding in the state budget?

I'm not sure mental health services and substance use prevention/treatment should be provided for by taxpayer dollars. While I agree that Nebraska needs robust services in these areas, we should look first to the private sector, then to public-private partnerships, before deciding that massive amounts of tax dollars can fix the problem. I would be interested in hearing ideas that Nebraska Cures has worked on pertaining to this issue. To be sure, I have experience with a national-level treatment enterprise that is very successful across the country and this is a great example of how the private sector may be better equipped to leverage best practices to more rapidly, efficiently and effectively find solutions to this challenging problem set.

What barriers do you see to Nebraskans accessing mental health care, and what role should the state play in addressing them? **The stigma around mental health care persists, and I believe that is the largest barrier to accessing care. Perhaps a PSA campaign around removing that stigma would be a good use of tax dollars. Again, I am open to listening and learning from Nebraska Cures on this important issue.**

F. Do you believe state investment in scientific and medical research is important to Nebraska's future? **YES**

G. Any final thoughts you would like to share about these any other critical public health issues?

As a combat veteran, I know mental health is important and the urgency we face. Of note, as a Commander I have been exposed to myriad mental health challenges from all services and across all specialties within our great military. This is a priority for me and thankfully, there is less stigma in private and public sectors with speaking up, taking time for mental and emotional well-being, etc. Furthermore, recently I have learned about the crisis with our farmers/ranchers in this great state. The pressures on farmers and ranchers are possibly at the highest levels in recent history and I am eager to be engaged on how we can address this soonest via public/private partnerships with a focus on awareness and resolution. Finally, I enjoyed my meeting with Amanda and in Omaha and would be very interested in meeting with Nebraska Cures soon to continue a dialogue where I can learn more about the issue and ideas the network of organizations working in the mental health space have formed to tackle this.

District 24

(Butler, Polk, Seward, and York Counties)

Jana Hughes

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A. Do you support state funding for biomedical research at Nebraska's research institutions? **YES**

In light of recent cuts, would you support restoring or increasing state investment in biomedical research? **Unsure/Need more information**

B. Do you support ensuring qualified researchers have timely access to public health data? **YES**

C. Do you support the existing compromise allowing for embryonic stem cell research on existing, federally approved stem cell lines? **YES**

D. Do you support state investment in research that helps Nebraska prepare for and respond to extreme weather events? **YES**

E. How would you prioritize mental health and substance use prevention and treatment funding in the state budget?

We are going to be in another tough biennium. The accelerated income tax reductions, the federal changes that dropped Nebraska funding and the economy have really hurt our financials. My goal is the tow the line with what we are currently doing and hopefully not have to go backward. I would like to see us broaden the sales tax base to bring in some revenue to offset what we have lost. I also think we need to really look at our rural communities where access to healthcare continues to diminish. Anything we can do telehealth wise we need to embrace.

What barriers do you see to Nebraskans accessing mental health care, and what role should the state play in addressing them?

I think some barriers are still the stigma – but I do believe that we are seeing that change as a society. I think the state can help point people in the direction they need to go to get help. I am very happy of the crises hotline we have that folks can dial 988 to access help. Back to my comment above – where you live can be a barrier. So however we can help get folks access (telehealth more rural supports, etc.) the better.

F. Do you believe state investment in scientific and medical research is important to Nebraska's future? **YES**

G. Any final thoughts you would like to share about these any other critical public health issues?

Thank for what you do to help make sure across the state has access and to keep reminding us how important these health issues can be.

Dan Winter

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A. Do you support state funding for biomedical research at Nebraska's research institutions? **YES**

In light of recent cuts, would you support restoring or increasing state investment in biomedical research? **Unsure/Need more information**

B. Do you support ensuring qualified researchers have timely access to public health data? **YES**

C. Do you support the existing compromise allowing for embryonic stem cell research on existing, federally approved stem cell lines? **NO**

D. Do you support state investment in research that helps Nebraska prepare for and respond to extreme weather events? **YES**

E. How would you prioritize mental health and substance use prevention and treatment funding in the state budget? **Mental health and substance abuse prevention should be prioritized, a healthy society should try to better the lives of its citizens. An article on the National Library of Medicine lists the best ways to prevent substance abuse comes down to three approaches universal, selected, and indicated. Universal approaches are programs such as DARE and "Just say NO", selected approaches are focused in at-risk groups i.e. targets ads in certain regions, community advocates; and indicated are programs focused on individuals (first strike and mandated counseling). Funding these styles of programs is necessary to keep the most number of individuals from falling into substance abuse. I would propose an increase to consumption taxes, maybe also consolidating public health initiatives.**

What barriers do you see to Nebraskans accessing mental health care, and what role should the state play in addressing them? **The major barrier to mental health care is that Nebraska's population is more rural than most other states at about 27%, compared to the national average of 20%. This leads to a lack of mental health care professionals, that are mostly focused in the urban areas. One other reason for the concentration of mental health professional in urban areas is the low reimbursements rates of Medicare/Medicaid limiting funding for private practice. Now this is not just a lack of mental health care professionals, but also the mind set of rural individuals. I myself am one of these rural individuals and can attest to generational ideas that asking for help can be seen as weakness. The state could invest more in total health awareness to improve all Nebraskans health. This could be through the campaigns like the successful "call 988" campaign. An investment in telehealth could lessen geographic barriers and ads could destigmatize mental health care.**

F. Do you believe state investment in scientific and medical research is important to Nebraska's future? **YES**

G. Any final thoughts you would like to share about these any other critical public health issues?

Societal health is the best way the better an individuals health outcome. Simply put if everyone is healthy then resource can be better allocated to those that would fall behind.

District 26

(Northeast and Central Lincoln)

George Dungan

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A. Do you support state funding for biomedical research at Nebraska's research institutions? **YES**

In light of recent cuts, would you support restoring or increasing state investment in biomedical research? **YES**

B. Do you support ensuring qualified researchers have timely access to public health data? **YES**

C. Do you support the existing compromise allowing for embryonic stem cell research on existing, federally approved stem cell lines? **YES**

D. Do you support state investment in research that helps Nebraska prepare for and respond to extreme weather events? **YES**

E. How would you prioritize mental health and substance use prevention and treatment funding in the state budget? **Mental health and substance abuse services need to be given more priority in our budget. We would save millions of dollars annually if we invested more in prevention and treatment. The alternative is to continue to treat these issues as a criminal justice issue, which is unjust and costly to taxpayers. There has also been demonstrated success with programs helping to pay for mental healthcare practitioners to get their degrees. We should strengthen and extend those programs to increase the stock of providers in Nebraska. I will continue to push for further funding for these issues in our state budget.**

What barriers do you see to Nebraskans accessing mental health care, and what role should the state play in addressing them? **The state needs to work to bring more mental health care providers into communities and to ensure we have systems in place to determine needs before it is too late. Many Nebraskans feel ashamed about the need to access mental health services, but we know that this care can be lifesaving, and so we need strong communities that can direct people in need to providers. The state also has a role in ensuring this care is affordable for Nebraskans and needs to live up to its obligations in terms of reimbursement rates.**

F. Do you believe state investment in scientific and medical research is important to Nebraska's future? **YES**

G. Any final thoughts you would like to share about these any other critical public health issues? **As I am wrapping up my first term in the Legislature, I want to share how grateful I am for the work of your organization and other healthcare leaders in educating lawmakers about the importance of these issues and possible solutions to strengthening our public health systems in Nebraska. It has been an honor to get to work with you and I look forward to continuing the partnership in 2027.**

Tobias Howard - No response to survey

District 28

(Central Lincoln, Lancaster County)

Patty Pansing Brooks & Colby L. Woodson

No response to survey

District 30

(South Lincoln, Lancaster County and Gage County)

Cally Ideus

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A. Do you support state funding for biomedical research at Nebraska's research institutions? **Unsure/Need more information**

In light of recent cuts, would you support restoring or increasing state investment in biomedical research? **Unsure/Need more information**

B. Do you support ensuring qualified researchers have timely access to public health data? **YES**

C. Do you support the existing compromise allowing for embryonic stem cell research on existing, federally approved stem cell lines? **Unsure/Need more information**

D. Do you support state investment in research that helps Nebraska prepare for and respond to extreme weather events? **YES**

E. How would you prioritize mental health and substance use prevention and treatment funding in the state budget? **As a veteran that has experienced mental health resources through the VA and has witness that gaps in healthcare across the nation in the mental health and substance use prevention and treatment, I am concerned with the lack of intentional resourcing that exists. I am very interested in having conversations around this issue.**

What barriers do you see to Nebraskans accessing mental health care, and what role should the state play in addressing them? **We have significant gaps in healthcare to include mental health. There are tactics that are being utilized nationally to mitigate however, Nebraska, to my knowledge, has not respected alternative options.**

F. Do you believe state investment in scientific and medical research is important to Nebraska's future? **YES**

G. Any final thoughts you would like to share about these any other critical public health issues?

I believe in continuity of care and the full spectrum of what that ecosystem is. From medical research to state and federal funding of health initiatives. Nebraska has illustrated exceptional excellence and has

opportunities to drive healthcare innovation. We have the largest amount of insurance company assets nationally. We have strategic industry partners that support this industry. I think we need to do a better job at communicating the collaborative interests.

Janet M. Bock

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A. Do you support state funding for biomedical research at Nebraska's research institutions? **YES**

In light of recent cuts, would you support restoring or increasing state investment in biomedical research? **YES**

B. Do you support ensuring qualified researchers have timely access to public health data? **YES**

C. Do you support the existing compromise allowing for embryonic stem cell research on existing, federally approved stem cell lines? **Unsure/Need more information**

D. Do you support state investment in research that helps Nebraska prepare for and respond to extreme weather events? **YES**

E. How would you prioritize mental health and substance use prevention and treatment funding in the state budget? **Access to quality behavioral health and substance use prevention should be a top priority in the state. When mental health/substance abuse is addressed, it has the potential to make the lives of all Nebraskans better, more productive, and less likely to enter or re-enter the state correctional system. Nebraskans need quick, reliable, evidence based medical/therapy interaction with more innovative access points such as corrections, public schools, and places of employment.**

What barriers do you see to Nebraskans accessing mental health care, and what role should the state play in addressing them? **Access to facilities other than Crises Centers or facilities such as Bryan West take too long. Often it takes weeks to months to get an appointment with a behavioral health provider. Behavioral health Urgent Care Centers could be an answer. 988 connection with a Behavioral Urgent Care Center in multiple areas of Nebraska could improve accessibility. Cost of medications is also an issue. Providers are forced to prescribe older medications that carry more possibility of side effects or extensive labs than newer more effective medications.**

F. Do you believe state investment in scientific and medical research is important to Nebraska's future? **YES**

G. Any final thoughts you would like to share about these any other critical public health issues?

I am uncertain how accurate research would be without the use of embryonic stem cells. I am pro-research to guide evidence-based health care.

District 32

(Filmore, Jefferson, Lancaster, Saline, and Thayer Counties)

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A. Do you support state funding for biomedical research at Nebraska's research institutions? **YES**

In light of recent cuts, would you support restoring or increasing state investment in biomedical research? **YES**

B. Do you support ensuring qualified researchers have timely access to public health data? **YES**

C. Do you support the existing compromise allowing for embryonic stem cell research on existing, federally approved stem cell lines? **YES**

D. Do you support state investment in research that helps Nebraska prepare for and respond to extreme weather events? **YES**

E. How would you prioritize mental health and substance use prevention and treatment funding in the state budget? **I believe that mental health and substance abuse prevention, treatment and recovery services is a vital priority for state funding. I have served as Public Health Solutions district health board chairman for many years serving the counties of southeast Nebraska and understand first hand the priority and importance of these issues. Additionally, I led the effort as a Jefferson County commissioner to institute our adult and juvenile diversion programs and school attendance program. It is far better for us to be pre-emptive and address issues up front rather than wait and address them reactively downstream. The costs to society are far greater downstream. I am very proud of the work that I have led on many efforts to serve our fellow citizens from the very young to the elderly all across the district and will work hard as a state senator to ensure that we are doing all we can to have the resources available to keep our fellow citizens from being detractors to society and help them be contributors to society. I already have many deep relationships with many key people and resources at the local, state and federal levels and will be able to start as a state senator well past square one.**

What barriers do you see to Nebraskans accessing mental health care, and what role should the state play in addressing them? **There are inadequate accessible mental health providers and resources across Nebraska but specifically in our rural areas. I have encountered this numerous times in my eleven years serving as a Jefferson County commissioner, in my many regional leadership roles and have heard it multiple times in the over 3,500 doors I have personally knocked meeting fellow citizens in 32 communities all across district 32. I have personally met one on one with nearly all the key health providers in district 32 and have heard this same concern from the executive directors and their staffs. We must do a better job of ensuring the resources are readily available in our rural areas and that they are affordable to address these challenges. Additionally, I have worked with and enjoy an excellent relationship with Dr. Steve Corsi, DHHS Director,**

who understands this challenge and is committed to addressing it. I will be a champion for this issue in the Legislature and look forward to leading bipartisan efforts to address it.

F. Do you believe state investment in scientific and medical research is important to Nebraska's future? **YES**

G. Any final thoughts you would like to share about these any other critical public health issues?

Public health and the issues addressed in this survey are vital and of utmost priority for the success, prosperity and vitality of our state and our fellow citizens. I have eleven years of experience serving with so many talented and dedicated private and public sector leaders across Nebraska from the local to the federal levels to address it. This will be an important priority for me as a state senator and I look forward to a close working relationship with Nebraska Cures to address the challenges that await!

Shaylene Smith

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A. Do you support state funding for biomedical research at Nebraska's research institutions? **YES**

In light of recent cuts, would you support restoring or increasing state investment in biomedical research? **YES**

B. Do you support ensuring qualified researchers have timely access to public health data? **YES**

C. Do you support the existing compromise allowing for embryonic stem cell research on existing, federally approved stem cell lines? **YES**

D. Do you support state investment in research that helps Nebraska prepare for and respond to extreme weather events? **YES**

E. How would you prioritize mental health and substance use prevention and treatment funding in the state budget? **My firm has a public defender contract in Southeast Nebraska and I have worked for decades to help families in crisis in family and juvenile settings. I am also legal guardian for someone whose entire adult life has been shrouded by mental health concerns and who is residing at the Regional Center under commitment at this time. I am, unfortunately, too familiar with what a lack of access to mental health and substance use prevention and treatment can lead to.**

That being said, I have seen the success of problem-solving courts – and I am firmly in support of any appropriation that would expand access to mental healthcare, as well as substance use prevention and treatment. Treating needs earlier and more aggressively will reduce the financial toll on our state. I'll say that on the floor of the Legislature, in committee hearings, and through my votes and introduced legislation.

What barriers do you see to Nebraskans accessing mental health care, and what role should the state play in addressing them? **Our rural communities are lacking access to these programs. We desperately need more**

providers in rural towns. Residents will not seek care if it requires over an hour drive. Telehealth is not always an option due to coverage or broadband issues and frankly, many of those in need of treatment truly cannot understand technology sufficiently to be successful with telehealth. Additionally, we need to reduce cost barriers. If someone is struggling with substance use issues, they may not be able to afford hundreds of dollars in treatment/counseling. Investing in these resources is a proven long-term solution that creates safer and healthier residents. The state has a duty to protect and ensure the health and safety of its people. Lastly, I'd also support legislation that incentivizes mental health professionals across the nation to live and work in Nebraska.

F. Do you believe state investment in scientific and medical research is important to Nebraska's future? **YES**

G. Any final thoughts you would like to share about these any other critical public health issues?

I know that every cent we invest in healthcare, biomedical research, and mental health/substance use treatment and prevention will bring a return on investment. Nebraska is capable of doing more and I am a firm supporter of not only restoring but expanding state investments in these crucial areas.

District 34

(Hall, Hamilton, Merrick, and Nance Counties)

Benjamin Blodgett

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A. Do you support state funding for biomedical research at Nebraska's research institutions? **YES**

In light of recent cuts, would you support restoring or increasing state investment in biomedical research? **YES**

B. Do you support ensuring qualified researchers have timely access to public health data? **YES**

C. Do you support the existing compromise allowing for embryonic stem cell research on existing, federally approved stem cell lines? **Unsure/Need more information**

D. Do you support state investment in research that helps Nebraska prepare for and respond to extreme weather events? **YES**

E. How would you prioritize mental health and substance use prevention and treatment funding in the state budget? **This is a difficult issue to prioritize because Nebraska is facing many important challenges that all deserve attention. However, I believe mental health and substance use disorders are connected to many of the other issues our state is experiencing. When individuals and families have access to mental health care and substance use treatment, we often see positive impacts in education, workforce, public safety, and overall strength of our communities. While we must continue addressing issues like property taxes, economic growth, and infrastructure, investing in mental health and substance use services can help**

improve Nebraska as a whole. I would support practical, fiscally responsible solutions that would expand access to treatment, especially in rural Nebraska, and ensure that taxpayer dollars are used effectively.

What barriers do you see to Nebraskans accessing mental health care, and what role should the state play in addressing them? **The biggest barriers to mental health care in Nebraska are the shortage of providers, especially in rural communities, long wait times, high costs, and limited transportation or broadband access in some areas. The state has an important role in improving access and working with local providers. I will work to invest in broadband in Nebraska to expand telehealth, support efforts to recruit and retain mental health professionals in under served areas.**

F. Do you believe state investment in scientific and medical research is important to Nebraska's future? **YES**

G. Any final thoughts you would like to share about these any other critical public health issues?

One thing that has always made me proud to be a Nebraskan is the top notch medical organizations in our great state and I want to keep that going in our state.

Loren Lippincott - No response to survey

District 36

(Sarpy County)

Rick Holdcroft

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A. Do you support state funding for biomedical research at Nebraska's research institutions? **YES**

In light of recent cuts, would you support restoring or increasing state investment in biomedical research? **Unsure/Need more information**

B. Do you support ensuring qualified researchers have timely access to public health data? **YES**

C. Do you support the existing compromise allowing for embryonic stem cell research on existing, federally approved stem cell lines? **YES**

D. Do you support state investment in research that helps Nebraska prepare for and respond to extreme weather events? **Unsure/Need more information**

E. How would you prioritize mental health and substance use prevention and treatment funding in the state budget?

I rely on the Director of Health and Human Services to recommend to the Governor the priorities for health and substance use prevention and treatment.

What barriers do you see to Nebraskans accessing mental health care, and what role should the state play in addressing them?

I am not aware of any barriers.

F. Do you believe state investment in scientific and medical research is important to Nebraska's future? **YES**

G. Any final thoughts you would like to share about these any other critical public health issues?

For answers B and D when addressing state investment, there must be a balance between what we would like to do versus the amount of funds that are available. Whether or not we can support more investment will depend on a number of factors which cannot be predicted at this time.

Darin Tompkins

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A. Do you support state funding for biomedical research at Nebraska's research institutions? **YES**

In light of recent cuts, would you support restoring or increasing state investment in biomedical research? **YES**

B. Do you support ensuring qualified researchers have timely access to public health data? **YES**

C. Do you support the existing compromise allowing for embryonic stem cell research on existing, federally approved stem cell lines? **YES**

D. Do you support state investment in research that helps Nebraska prepare for and respond to extreme weather events? **YES**

E. How would you prioritize mental health and substance use prevention and treatment funding in the state budget? **Treatment for mental health and substance use is an extremely pressing public health concern. If we do not properly address these issues, they pose a public safety issue not only for themselves but for others around them. I will always work to include appropriate funding for mental health, addiction services, and substance use prevention in the state's budget. We need to start being proactive, instead of reactive and these are investments that have proven to be positive long-term solutions.**

What barriers do you see to Nebraskans accessing mental health care, and what role should the state play in addressing them? **In Nebraska, we face a number of issues that present a barrier to accessing mental health care. Especially in rural communities, this is a concern because some individuals may not seek care because of the social stigma and the fear of becoming the topic in the town's social circles. As someone who grew up in a rural community and has family living in a rural community, I understand these social dynamics on a personal level. This, alongside a shortage of providers, poses unique complications. If we can continue our efforts towards expanding telehealth and access to affordable healthcare across the state, I think it would go a long way towards breaking down barriers to healthcare access. The state has a role in ensuring Nebraskans basic needs are met, and public health should be a top priority.**

F. Do you believe state investment in scientific and medical research is important to Nebraska's future? **YES**

G. Any final thoughts you would like to share about these any other critical public health issues?

In Nebraska, we have narrowly avoided hospital closures in rural communities across the state due to a variety of factors, ranging from staffing shortages to administrative burdens to Medicaid reimbursement cuts. This presents unique problems that are specific to rural areas, as the distance traveled to access care would become even greater than it already is if these hospitals closed. This becomes a major problem when time is of the essence. If it is an emergency or a mother needs prenatal care, every second counts. Many of these challenges that we face are interconnected and compound on top of one another; this, in turn, hurts rural communities' ability to survive. The lack of federal support and constantly changing dynamics only serve to create more instability in this area, leaving the legislature as the last line of defense for healthcare in these communities. We are also experiencing more and more mental health issues in schools that need to be addressed. Kids spend most of their time at school and they should be able to access services, especially at times when they need it most. Senators have the responsibility to make the tough decisions and prioritize the health and welfare of the citizens of our state. As a state senator, I want to work with your organization and meet with experts on these issues to learn how I can best support the needs of everyday Nebraskans.

District 38

(Clay, Franklin, Furnas, Harlan, Nuckolls, Phelps, Red Willow, and Webster Counties)

Janell Anderson Ehrke

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Social Media: www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=61586577100992

Address: PO Box 512 Orleans, NE 68966



A. Do you support state funding for biomedical research at Nebraska's research institutions? **YES**

In light of recent cuts, would you support restoring or increasing state investment in biomedical research? **YES**

B. Do you support ensuring qualified researchers have timely access to public health data? **YES**

C. Do you support the existing compromise allowing for embryonic stem cell research on existing, federally approved stem cell lines? **Unsure/Need more information**

D. Do you support state investment in research that helps Nebraska prepare for and respond to extreme weather events? **YES**

E. How would you prioritize mental health and substance use prevention and treatment funding in the state budget? **Mental health and substance abuse treatment should be treated just like physical health care. Instead of raising taxes on working families, Nebraska should build dedicated funding streams using opioid settlements, gaming revenues, targeted health-related taxes, federal matching dollars, and a permanent Behavioral Health Trust Fund. By investing in treatment and prevention today, we can reduce incarceration, emergency room costs, homelessness, and improve the quality of life for Nebraska families.**

What barriers do you see to Nebraskans accessing mental health care, and what role should the state play in addressing them? **The biggest challenge facing rural Nebraska isn't whether mental health services exist somewhere in the state it's whether people can actually access them. In District 38, families often drive hours for counseling, face long waiting lists, or have no local options at all. We need practical solutions that bring providers, telehealth, recovery services, and crisis care closer to the communities where people live and work. Mental health care should be as accessible as primary care, regardless of your ZIP code. The State's job is to make sure every Nebraskan has reasonable access to mental health and substance abuse treatment, regardless of their ZIP code. Government cannot solve every problem, but it can remove barriers, support local providers, and help communities build solutions that work for them.**

F. Do you believe state investment in scientific and medical research is important to Nebraska's future? **YES**

G. Any final thoughts you would like to share about these any other critical public health issues? **Nebraska's healthcare challenges aren't just about hospitals and insurance. In rural communities, it's about whether you can find a doctor, counselor, or treatment program when you need one. We need to strengthen rural healthcare, address mental health and substance abuse, and continue supporting medical research at UNMC that leads to better treatments and stronger economic growth. Every Nebraskan deserves access to quality healthcare regardless of where they live.**

Tim Anderson - No response to survey

District 41

(Boone, Buffalo, Greeley, Half, Howard, Sherman, Valley, and Wheeler Counties)

Jeremy Heneger

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A. Do you support state funding for biomedical research at Nebraska's research institutions? **No Response**

In light of recent cuts, would you support restoring or increasing state investment in biomedical research? **No Response**

B. Do you support ensuring qualified researchers have timely access to public health data? **No Response**

C. Do you support the existing compromise allowing for embryonic stem cell research on existing, federally approved stem cell lines? **No Response**

D. Do you support state investment in research that helps Nebraska prepare for and respond to extreme weather events? **No Response**



E. How would you prioritize mental health and substance use prevention and treatment funding in the state budget? **Mental health and substance use prevention and treatment are top priorities for me. I have witnessed firsthand the hardships that families endure when there is a lack of mental health resources. Ensuring rural NE has access to all types of health care is also extremely important to me.**

What barriers do you see to Nebraskans accessing mental health care, and what role should the state play in addressing them? **Lack of mental health care providers, and this is especially true for rural Nebraskans. I would support legislation that incentivizes people to enter the mental health field and work in rural locations.**

F. Do you believe state investment in scientific and medical research is important to Nebraska's future?

G. Any final thoughts you would like to share about these any other critical public health issues?
As I said above, I have been extremely upset by the federal and state cuts to scientific research. Publicly funded research is a great way to stimulate the economy and to keep the United States of America and Nebraska as scientific leaders. The government also has a responsibility to provide timely and high-quality data for the public at large and for research. Efforts to eliminate and undermine public data are unacceptable and harmful. I fully support Nebraska Cures, and if I win the election, you will find me a strong ally for all types of scientific research.

Joe Johnson - No response to survey

District 42

(Hooker, Lincoln, Logan, McPherson, Perkins, and Thomas Counties)

Mike Jacobson & Shaylee S. Scranton - No response to survey

District 48

(Banner, Kimball, and Scotts Bluff Counties)

Jessica M. Landers

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Address: 2110 5th Ave, Scottsbluff NE

A. Do you support state funding for biomedical research at Nebraska's research institutions? **YES**

In light of recent cuts, would you support restoring or increasing state investment in biomedical research? **Unsure/Need more information**

B. Do you support ensuring qualified researchers have timely access to public health data? **YES**

C. Do you support the existing compromise allowing for embryonic stem cell research on existing, federally approved stem cell lines? **Unsure/Need more information**



D. Do you support state investment in research that helps Nebraska prepare for and respond to extreme weather events? **YES**

E. How would you prioritize mental health and substance use prevention and treatment funding in the state budget? **Mental health and substance prevention needs to be a top priority in the Nebraska Legislature. This includes mental health training for law enforcement officers to identify a mental health crisis vs. criminal activity or how to address a mental health crisis before it becomes criminal activity or dangerous. This includes more/better access to mental health resources in rural Nebraska. This includes supporting our mental health providers so that they can have access to patients and that Nebraskans can have access to the resources. I would support funding for our youth with the goal of having fewer children removed from their parents for inpatient care across Nebraska. I support funding for incentives to draw practitioners to Western Nebraska.**

What barriers do you see to Nebraskans accessing mental health care, and what role should the state play in addressing them? **As an Attorney who is practicing in the Juvenile and Criminal Court system taking court appointments, I see the biggest barriers to mental health care as access. Many providers are not taking new patients, those that are have wait lists of several weeks to several months. Any inpatient treatment requires travel to Lincoln or Omaha and Nebraska Medicaid will not cover care in Wyoming or Colorado which is much closer.**

F. Do you believe state investment in scientific and medical research is important to Nebraska's future? **YES**

G. Any final thoughts you would like to share about these any other critical public health issues?
I support both public and private funding for medical and scientific research. I am most interested in seeing public funding going to university research programs in this State. Places like UNMC and UNL have research labs and are making advancements in various fields of study while teaching the next generation of scientists. I would like to see UNK and Chadron State College and smaller trade schools that offer farming degrees to start a research program for their students. My father was a Professor of Physics at UNK and he self-funded some programs and provided some incredible opportunities for his students but with state backing he could have done some amazing things as well. We can't forget greater Nebraska as we explore what is next for Nebraska.

Brian Hardin

No response to survey