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Changed "closed to public" to "restricted access"

NEWS RELEASE | **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE** | REVISED March 24, 2020

Human service zones continue to provide vital services, but restrict public access

BISMARCK, N.D. – The North Dakota Department of Human Services and the 19 human service zones, formerly called county social service offices, have restricted public access to their administrative offices but are continuing to provide vital human services. Department staff who work in the counties and human service zone offices and team members are continuing to provide all services by working on-site or remotely to practice social distancing.

This announcement applies to NDDHS central office divisions and human services zones (formerly county social service offices). Watch for additional information about regional human service clinics.

"We know that people are experiencing stress, uncertainty and financial hardship, and we want the public to know that human service zone offices are still operational and delivering important services, including child welfare services, eligibility determination for Medicaid, SNAP and other economic assistance programs. Employees are also continuing to connect people to other local supportive services and resources," said the department's Chief Operating Officer Sara Stolt.

Stolt said, that while public face-to-face services have been affected, employees at human service zone offices can communicate with clients by phone and email. In addition, clients can drop off applications, verifications and other necessary paperwork for economic assistance at designated drop boxes available at human service zone office locations.

North Dakotans are strongly encouraged to use the state agency's self-service portal to apply for Medicaid health care coverage, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Child Care Assistance, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families and other programs. Details about applying for help are online at www.nd.gov/dhs/info/pubs/application.html.

To simplify the online application process for first-time users and to help clients manage their economic assistance program cases, the department produced and uploaded a series of new tutorial videos on the agency's website late last week.

"These are challenging times," said the department's Executive Director Chris Jones. "We understand how important it is for those most affected by the instability caused by this public health crisis to have access to resources that can provide a bridge to more stable times. The department will continue to work together with the human service zones and other partners to sustain essential services and supports for people who are struggling."

Human service zone office information is online at www.nd.gov/dhs/locations/countysocialserv/.

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