

After rocky start, Bayer settles in to connecting state center with 115 public health departments

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Tiffany Bayer likes to joke that when she arrived at the Center for Local Public Health Services as its new director in 2020, she had about five minutes to get acclimated to her new job before she was suddenly leading the center in the middle of a global pandemic.

Bayer's office is a part of the Department of Health and Senior Services' Division of Community and Public Health.

But the COVID-19 world quickly initiated her into the role where a big part of her job is communicating with the 115 local public health agencies across the state. Her office would schedule daily calls with the agencies to ensure administrators and staff had the information and daily changes that she had.

In her role as a "liaison" between the county health departments, the center and other partners, she is in charge of developing relationships and building trust with administrators and staff. Her goal was for her office to become the one health departments look to first for information and support, she said.

When she came, she hung a large state map on her wall with tags on it representing the individual counties and administrators.

"I am a visual person, so I have to be able to see my counties and my people," she said.

Although the role was new to her, her previous experience as a social worker, which included work as a children's service worker, was of great help and her strength as a "people person" helped immensely during this time, she said.

SNAPSHOT

"I sometimes would pick up the phone and have a 30-minute conversation because they just needed someone to talk to," she said. "(Sometimes) I didn't have any answers. But I could listen. I was a great listener."

It gave her a chance to start getting to know all the different local directors and their personalities.

"They're the ones that make me want to get out of bed every morning and do what I do," she said.

Prior to coming to the role, Bayer worked as the planning manager for the Division of Community and Public Health, which is part of DHSS. This allowed her to become more familiar with programs that public health agencies use that "address public health, disease control, food/water safety, injury prevention and more," supported by the division, according to the DHSS website.

"I was exposed to all the division programs, including their budgets, how they operate, who they serve, etc., instead of focusing on one specific program," she said. "This has allowed me to have a diverse knowledge base of the division, which in turn allows me to better assist the (local public health agencies) as they work with a wide variety of our division programs."

"I think that is essential for understanding the whole story of what we do," Bayer added.

When the health departments get a new administrator, Bayer travels and does training with them. She said she has traveled to almost every office



Julie Smith/News Tribune

Tiffany Bayer is shown in her Department of Health and Senior Services office, where she serves as director of the Center for Local Public Health Services.

across the state in her five years at the center.

She provides training for each department's board, too, helping members understand DHSS's role, how the agencies collaborate, the best practices for board service, and the statutes that guide public health departments.

The center also handles the contracts tied to public health funding, according to Bayer. When the federal government allocates money for local public health, it flows through the center. State dollars

do as well, she said.

In addition, she helps build relationships and support systems between the agencies. For example, she'll connect a county with some of its neighboring counties.

"Then they'll have that support system," she said. "It's almost like a big brother, big sister type atmosphere. I know a lot about what they do, but I don't do their jobs, so I don't know everything there is to know."