

Kanjiqsirugut News

kang-ik'-see-roo'-koot (Iñupiaq): we understand

Winter 2021

The Newsletter of Norton Sound Health Corporation

No. 72

Reentry program helps clients land on their feet

When David Graham was 4 years old, he was adopted by his grandmother and moved from where his parents lived in Oregon to Selawik, Alaska. As a teen, he started drinking and smoking, attempting to keep up with his peers.

It wasn't until nearly four decades later that Graham realized there was more to life than he once thought. In 2020, he enrolled in Norton Sound Health Corporation's Behavioral

Health Services and the Nome Reentry Program. The combined support of these programs, he says, saved his life.

"Before, I would just keep my feelings bottled up and drink or use. I thought that was how it was supposed to be ... but there's a whole different side of life out there."

"Before, I would just keep my feelings bottled up and drink or use," Graham said. "I thought that was how it was supposed to be. That's how I

thought life was, but there's a whole different side of life out there. It's called living. It's not dying, like what

I was doing."

The Nome Reentry Coalition was formed in 2017 as a way to help transition incarcerated individuals back into

the community before and after their release from Anvil Mountain Correctional Center (AMCC).

Over the past four years, several organizations have collaborated to make the program a success, including NSHC's Behavioral Health Services, Kawerak, Arctic Access, Nome Community Center, Seaside Center, City of Nome, and Alaska Department of Corrections. The coalition offers services based on what

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Photo: Reba Lean

Nathaniel Piscoya, his father Bobby, and grandfather Stan help dress an outdoor willow in the spirit of the season. Norton Sound Health Corporation sends its wishes for wellness, joy, and treasured moments with family and friends across the region.

Point of Care workers lift fair share of COVID burden

The Norton Sound Health Corporation laboratory is a fast-paced environment. Most of its action occurs behind the scenes—not where members of the public are called in to sit for blood draws or other specimen collections.

Behind the lab's closed doors, in a sterile environment, intelligent machines hum, beep, and blink as they process untold amounts of information.

A department within the laboratory, known as Point of Care, straddles the line between the out-of-view analyzers and the public interface. It is through this program that all COVID-19 testing is run. To keep up with the large testing need that the pandemic presents, NSHC used federal emergency funding to hire Point of Care testing assistants in every regional community.

Those staff members have made all the difference in NSHC's COVID-19 response, and their utility has been proven especially during local outbreaks.

Miriam Kulowiyi is Savoonga's POC testing assistant, and she started her job in February 2021 but felt the

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COVID-19 response shifts to infection control

By MARK PETERSON, M.D.
NSHC Medical Director

The response to the COVID-19 pandemic is starting to take on a new form: one that is less anxious and less stressed than the last two years have been.



The state of the pandemic is far less worrisome now than when it first began, thanks to the tools that are now

at our disposal.

COVID-19 vaccinations are available to anyone in the region who is 5 years old and older. Booster shots are available to everyone over age 18 if they are six months out from their initial vaccination with either the Pfizer or Moderna vaccines or two months out with the Johnson & Johnson vaccine.

Treatments like monoclonal antibodies are now available for high-risk patients who test positive for the virus. Other promising medications are on the horizon for approval from federal regulators.

The Norton Sound/Bering Strait region has proven to be a pretty nice place to be throughout this pandemic.

Tribal and community leaders continue to meet with Norton Sound Health Corporation administrators and medical staff to determine community guidance when local infections strike. Organizations work together to implement COVID-19 precautions. Regional residents have put their values of family and community on display, as they do what they can to practice infection prevention and mitigation.

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Role modeling tribally governed care

Happy holidays! NSHC wrapped up FY21 with success. Much appreciation goes to the staff for continuing to carry out their regular job duties in addition to the extra duties and stress related to the pandemic. NSHC, in partnership with our regional village leadership teams, has



Angie's Report

Angela Gorn
CEO & President

kept the region safe. Our thoughts and prayers are with the families who have lost loved ones during the pandemic. The pediatric vaccine has now been approved and efforts will focus on vaccinating our youth 5-11 years old. We look forward to building the immunity our region needs to keep COVID-19 infections to a minimum moving forward.

Our workforce continues to grow with nearly 800 employees on payroll. To kick off FY22, the NSHC Board approved a \$227 million operating budget—the highest budget on record

due to the addition of supplemental COVID-19 funding and associated expenses related to the pandemic.

Patient care volumes continue to exceed pre-pandemic volumes and the acute care census remained steady. Deliveries were on par with FY20 levels. Telehealth visits continued with an upward trend in FY21 and have remained a favorable option for patients.

Several capital projects were completed in FY21, including the Wellness and Training Center and the Shishmaref Clinic. Please see the updates on page 12 of this newsletter. At the annual board meeting in September, the Board of Directors approved to move forward with a child care building design and a 12-bed QCC expansion design. The long-term care needs of the region continue to grow.

NSHC worked collaboratively with its partners this spring and summer to pre-develop the regional water and sewer Community Utility Assistance Program. A project manager has been hired and a leadership committee has been meeting to develop the business plan. All villages have received a financial assessment from a hired accounting firm and an engineering consultant

has been hired to begin engineering assessments for the city governments' utility systems. The Infrastructure Bill will provide \$700 million in sanitation funding for Alaska in 2022. Stebbins has a completed Preliminary Engineering Report and Teller's report is nearly completed. Diomed, Shishmaref, and Wales have a plan in place for the initiation and completion of their reports. The significant amount of funding available and all the work underway within the region through strong collaborative partnerships, brings hope for many that water and sewer will one day be a reality for all.

The Public Relations Team has been busy providing daily COVID-19 communications while continuing to keep the region informed about other NSHC highlights.

We look forward to making progress on initiatives in FY22, including enhanced home-based patient care, improved recruitment and retention for hard-to-fill positions, progress with village-based staff housing needs, continued behavioral health services outreach, and increased flu and COVID-19 vaccine, pap test, and mammogram outreach.

Best wishes for a safe and happy 2022!

EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT

Rena Sparks ignites her passion in Pharmacy

Rena Sparks grew up in Nome and is a pharmacy technician at the Norton Sound Regional Hospital Pharmacy. She began working for NSHC in March 2018 and started in the pharmacy about one year later. Rena has since been promoted and certified to provide vaccinations, including COVID-19 vaccinations. This is an interview with her on her experiences as a pharmacy technician.

Can you describe your role?

I help patients in our region through answering phones, helping them fill their medications, and ensuring delivery of medications. I also restock inventory, help out at the front of the pharmacy, go to other departments to restock medications, and get totes ready to go to the airport for our regional villages.



What inspired you to seek extra training?

I wanted to have additional opportunities to help the community and the surrounding villages. The vaccination course included online and hands-on training. After my training, I completed a written and practical test. Since then, I have provided hundreds of immunizations, and I definitely have more opportunities to help patients.

What's the best part of your job?

The connections. It's very satisfying to get to know people, on the phone

Rena Sparks enters medication information into the pharmacy system as she prepares a supplies kit for the medevac team. Photo: Reba Lean

or in person. It's amazing, the connections! I've talked with health aides, nurses, doctors, and patients.

Whenever I have a patient ask for me by name, I am very flattered. I am also happy to have the opportunity to travel to the villages. Recently, I went to Shishmaref, and it was the best thing. Once they realized it was me who they'd been talking to on the phone, it was like seeing your best friend after years of being apart.

And I don't know what I would do without my coworkers. We all work together to provide the best care possible. As with any job, there are good and

bad days, but I wouldn't have it any other way. We really try to help each other out.

What are some memorable moments in the pharmacy?

When I started working here, of course I was super nervous and overwhelmed. I remember I had to write everything down or have tons of sticky notes everywhere, but fast forward to now, I found my old notebook, and it blew my mind, how much I have learned since.

There have been rush hours that have lasted all day, but at the end of it all, I really appreciate how my teammates support one another and make the job more fun. Either it's an inside joke, a song stuck in someone's head that gets stuck in everyone else's heads, or the simplest "Good morning." It's the little things that make my day.



POINT OF CARE

Continued from page 1

workload take its toll in November. In Savoonga, a large outbreak between October and November pulled on clinic resources not only locally but from other village clinics as well. Kulowiyi says she couldn't have managed all the testing without the support from Bridgette Sherman, a POC testing assistant from Teller, who flew in to help throughout the outbreak.

"Truthfully, every single essential worker definitely felt overworked," Kulowiyi said. "This outbreak spread rapidly and overwhelmed everyone. I think it was a big reminder and eye opener that this virus is real and can strike anywhere."

Walking door to door to get households tested, they worked every single weekend for a month. Their first day off was a Thursday, on Veterans Day. All tests were shipped to Nome, except those from symptomatic individuals that were processed in Savoonga with the rapid ID NOW analyzer.

Back in Nome, Carol "Binxy" Johnson's role in the laboratory ensures the smooth operation of the Point of Care

"Truthfully, every single essential worker definitely felt overworked. This outbreak spread rapidly and overwhelmed everyone. I think it was a big reminder and eye opener that this virus is real and can strike anywhere."

—Miriam Kulowiyi, Savoonga

department. She works as the POC testing technologist, which means she is involved in all the testing carried out at NSHC. She not only collects samples and runs analyzers, but she certifies others to run those machines, too.

In the last year-and-a-half, Johnson's duties have tripled, if not more, due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

These days, she finds herself constantly multi-tasking, largely because of the additional training needed around the region.

"In previous years before the pandemic, we had one training bi-weekly

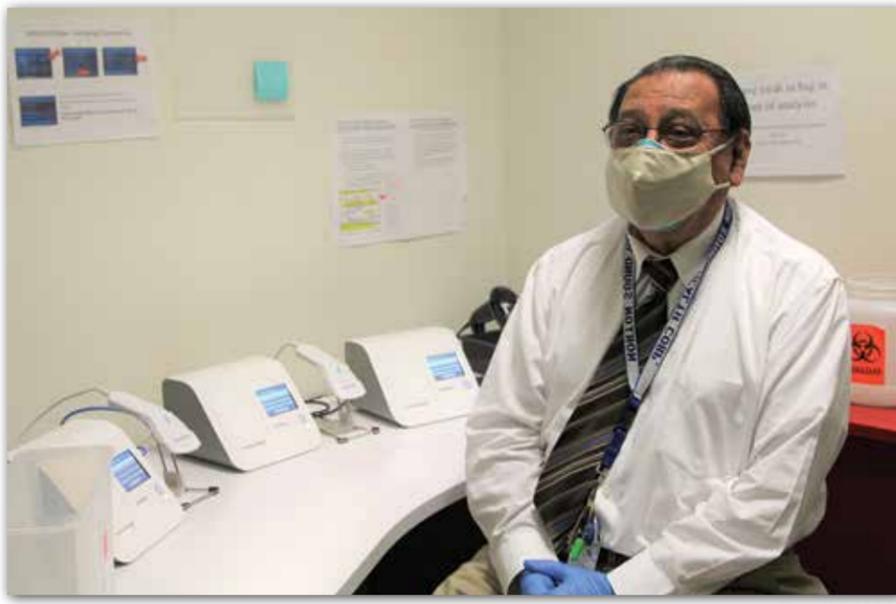
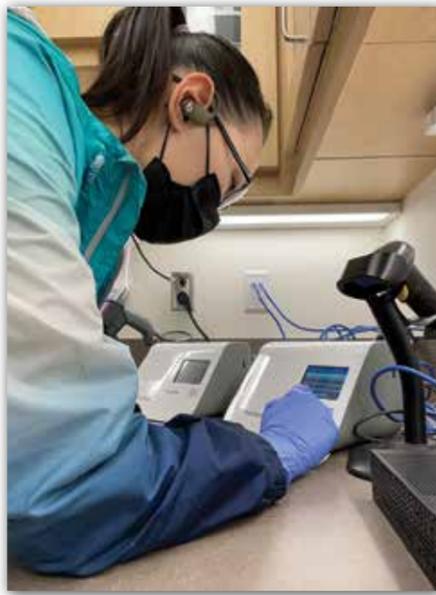


Photo: Alexis Erikson

Rolando Garcia-Morales can be seen next to the department's three Abbott ID NOW units, which test for COVID-19.

or sometimes one monthly," she said. "For the past two-plus years, besides having two trainings bi-weekly, I must arrange three to four trainings on top of my busy schedule to accommodate more staff."

Johnson started in the Point of Care department within Nome's laboratory



Miriam Kulowiyi of Savoonga prepares the Abbott ID NOW. Having this analyzer in village communities provides the option of receiving test results within an hour.

as a POC testing assistant in 2016. In July 2021, she accepted her current role. She now oversees staff in Nome and trains all village-based POC assistants.

The Point of Care Program was initiated in 2010 and has enabled the screening and treatment process to

be completed during a single encounter, thereby improving access to care, counseling, and patient outcomes. By providing accurate and quick data, point-of-care testing has increased NSHC's response and diagnosis time in regional communities.

Separated from the laboratory's bustling scene is a small office space where the lab's manager and director of the POC program, Rolando Garcia-Morales, oversees it all.

Garcia-Morales is a veteran to the modifications the laboratory and POC program sees every day. He begins each day by making sure all villages have materials and reagents in stock to cover testing for the next three weeks. Afterwards, he pores over quality control logs to make sure things are going smoothly. Reading quality control logs daily gives him insight on staff and machines.

"By performing QC, we make sure that the instrument, materials, and reagents, as well as the staff performing the test, are in an optimal condition and meet the standards to start testing patients," he said.

For the last year-and-a-half, community health aides and POC assistants in the villages have actively participated in the diagnosis and prevention of COVID-19 infections. In each village, there are two ways to diagnose the infection: they can either administer a rapid test using an Abbott ID NOW analyzer, which takes 15 minutes to an hour to run, or they can administer a test that will be sent to Nome and processed through the COBAS 6800 or through a smaller machine called a Cepheid.

"Both are molecular testing, but in Nome, the machines are more accurate, precise sensitive, and specific—all of which are important characteristics to diagnose and monitor positive individuals and their close contacts," Garcia-Morales said.

One of the biggest changes the POC program has seen is an increase in the daily number of patients tested, particularly for COVID-19. Region-wide, about 1,200 COVID-19 tests are administered in an average week. That number can reach upward to 3,000 tests if there is an outbreak in any of the region's villages. COVID-19 testing makes up about a third of all test-

New tools empower village health care teams

Eight of the region's villages have multiple instruments on hand, such as an ID NOW, an i-STAT, and Clinitek Urinalysis.

Each of these analyzers can be used only by a health aide or POC assistant who has been certified with the instrument. These portable analyzers have improved patient care by providing quick results within the village.

The POC program now has 10 different analyzers and 20 assay machines. Among them are:

1. **Abott ID NOW** - a rapid, molecular point-of-care test that detects COVID-19 within 15 minutes to one hour.
2. **Clinitek Urinalysis Analyzer** - an automated point-of-care urinalysis analyzer that aids in the assessment, diagnosis, and monitoring of chronic conditions. It is the only dual-purpose point-of-care analyzer for urinalysis testing and urine hCG pregnancy testing.
3. **i-STAT CHEM8** - can be used to rapidly assess the metabolic status of patients in a variety of clinical settings including critical care, surgery, radiology, acute and emergency care, and village-based settings.
4. **HemoCue** - a diagnostic tool for anemia. White blood cell count provides valuable information in the diagnosis or exclusion of an infection.
5. **Sofia** - this detects RSV, influenza and streptococcus.
6. **Affinion Assay** - tests glycosylated hemoglobin in human whole blood, used to monitor metabolic control in patients with diabetes. It provides the immediate test results you need for improved diabetic control, better patient outcomes, and enhanced clinic efficiencies.
7. **Nova stat strip** - This single use test system is used to measure blood glucose levels, also known as blood sugar, from a fingertip.

ing the lab does each week.

In Nome, the Point of Care Program recently received a COBAS 6800. Offering highly efficient sampling processes, this machine can sample up to 900 COVID-19 tests within four hours. This has given relief to the department, allowing staff to monitor testing in all the villages in a more organized way.

Looking forward, NSHC continues to seek higher quality and more efficient products and services.

The workload of Point of Care staff has increased within the last two years, and because of their continued hard work, improved testing techniques, and an increase in state-of-the-art technology, residents of the Norton Sound region have experienced more accurate, efficient, and immediate health care.



Photo: Alexis Erikson

Alex Bahnke prepares and loads a tray of COVID-19 tests into the COBAS 6800, NSHC's newest molecular diagnostic machine.

YOUR BEST LIFE

NEWS & VIEWS FROM THE CAMP DEPARTMENT AT NORTON SOUND HEALTH CORPORATION

Teaming up to decrease traumatic brain injuries

By Katie Hannon

NSHC Injury Prevention Coordinator

The Norton Sound Health Corporation Injury Prevention Program is excited to be one of the Part 1 Indian Health Service-funded TIPCAP Programs for 2020-2025. The Norton Sound region experiences some of the highest injury rates within Alaska. The majority of these accidents are preventable—and they often result in traumatic brain injuries.

Many residents in Nome and the regional villages travel via all-terrain vehicles (ATVs), including snowmobiles, four-wheelers, and side by sides. These vehicles in many cases are used for everyday transportation as well as for subsistence hunting and gathering.

Unfortunately, because they are used so routinely in everyday tasks, these vehicles might seem less hazardous. Due to our high rate of accidents, we know this is an issue and that more education and resources are needed to emphasize the need for helmet use in our region.

Therefore, one focus for this new grant cycle is to reduce traumatic brain injuries by increasing helmet safety education and equipment.

Our program enables us to order helmets in a variety of sizes to have available for residents. We promote helmet safety and education through community events. In 2021, we collaborated to host a youth snowmobile race in the spring and a bike rodeo in the summer.

Youth snowmobile race

Mariah Morgan, a Nome community member, led planning efforts for the Youth Snowmobile Race in March 2021.

“Snowmachine racing has been a popular sport in Nome for decades,” Morgan said. “With the Nome-Golovin race, Nome CannonBall, and hosting the Iron Dog’s halfway point in Nome each year, hundreds of fans show support within the Bering Strait region.

“The youth hadn’t had a race for



Mariah Morgan signals the start to racers in one heat of the youth 120/200 snowmachine races in Nome in March 2021. Six of the 20 participants won full-face helmets.

quite some time, so in March of 2021 local parents and volunteers put on a 120/200 snowmachine race for youth ages 4-12,” Morgan explained.

The race was sponsored by the City of Nome and coordinated by Morgan. NSHC’s Injury Prevention Program co-sponsored the event, raffling off full-face helmets for six of the 20 registered youth racers.

“Prior to the race start time, the 20 registered youth racers were given an overview on the importance of helmet safety and injury prevention,” Morgan said. “Each youth racer signed a pledge that indicated their understanding and promise to practice safe riding.”

Placing first in the various heats of the event were Drew (Booth) Bernard, age 6; Keegan Musich, age 11; Gabriella Hughes, age 7; Kodey Hughes, age 9; and Lane Schuerch, age 12.

Bike rodeo

Katie Hannon and NSHC’s Injury Prevention Program led planning efforts for a bike rodeo and handed out over 80 bicycle helmets to every child who participated. Participants visited resource tables, biked through a safety course, and got their bikes maintained.

We are fortunate to have great partners in our region who support and build upon our injury prevention efforts. During our bike rodeo:

► Kawerak Early Head Start/Head Start sponsored the event and provided refreshments, Subway treats, bottled water, and door prizes. Kawerak also had a resource table with services and enrollment information available, where parents had an opportunity to fill out an application while waiting in line to get bikes maintained.

► Andy Peterson, a community

member who works at one of our local snowmobile shops, volunteered to help work on kids’ bikes. He did some tune ups and maintenance repairs and recalled volunteering to help with Nome’s last bike rodeo almost 10 years ago. He wanted to help with the event because it was something he did with his older son.

► Maggie Miller, with NSHC’s Native Connections Program, hosted a resource table and offered incentives for people who visited their table.

► NSHC’s CAMP Department Tobacco Prevention Program hosted a table to encourage tobacco-free events.

A challenge for us this last summer was not being able to travel to offer similar events in regional villages. We plan to host events in more communities next year and get more helmets out in the region.

CAMP training six new community fitness instructors

The CAMP department is currently training six new community fitness instructors. The individuals were selected in October to enroll in a grant-funded certification program.

The training will allow them to gain the knowledge and experience to provide regular group fitness classes in the community.

The instructors intend to focus on indoor cycling, pilates, high intensity interval training workouts, and a variation of Zumba for children called Zumbini.



New fitness instructors, from left: Brodie Kimmel, Katie Fry, Leah Anderson, Nikki Mertz, Stephanie Stang, Tracy Gregg.



The land feeds her spirit

Carol Seppilu, NSHC IñŪA outreach coordinator, draws on her own experiences to help others through her work with suicide prevention and in her personal life. She says: "When I'm on a mountain, it can be windy and cold, but I'm climbing and smiling because I feel so connected to the land. It inspires me to connect with my own iñua (spirit), so that when I'm going through a difficult time in life, I can keep going with a smile." If you follow Seppilu on social media, you know she dresses for conditions and gets out in all types of weather, day or night.



Don't let winter slow you down

Indoors or outdoors, you can stay active in cold weather

When winter blows in (and stays for months), you can pull your cozy blankets over your head and go back to sleep—or you can suit up and head out for an outdoor winter adventure!

There's no reason you need to take a break from physical activity when the temperature drops. In fact, exercising in cooler weather has some distinct advantages over working out in warmer weather.

Big benefits of winter activity

- ▶ No heat to deal with. Winter's chill might make you feel awake and invigorated.
- ▶ You may be able to work out longer in cold weather—which means you can burn even more calories.



Photo by Jessica Ivanoff

Kelsey Fagerstrom, her mom Joanne, and Crystal Fagerstrom enjoy Nordic walking at Golovin as part of an NSHC tobacco prevention activity in April 2021. Nordic walking is a total-body exercise done with specially designed walking poles.

- ▶ Exercise boosts your immunity during cold and flu season.

- ▶ It's a great opportunity to see the Northern Lights!

Try these outdoor activities

- ▶ Brisk walking
- ▶ Nordic walking (walking sticks are available to rent from the CAMP Department)
- ▶ Jogging or running
- ▶ Shoveling snow
- ▶ Ice skating
- ▶ Hockey
- ▶ Sledding
- ▶ Cross-country skiing
- ▶ Snowshoeing

Bye-bye, Couch Potato!

If the winter weather prevents you from getting outside, don't just reach for the remote. Make your time inside count.

There are many ways to get physical activity indoors—no gym required. Hand weights or resistance bands are a great addition, but not necessary. You can also wear a heavy backpack to add intensity to your workout.

Try these indoor activities

- ▶ Home workout circuit
- ▶ Dancing
- ▶ Active housework like vacuuming and sweeping
- ▶ Stair climbing
- ▶ Yoga or other fun groups classes at the Rec Center or your local gymnasium (i.e. soccer, basketball, martial arts or Strong Nation)
- ▶ Complete the monthly wellness calendars from CAMP

The American Heart Association recommends at least 150 minutes of aerobic exercise per week (or 21 minutes a day) to improve your quality of life. Move more, with more intensity, and sit less. Make this winter an active winter!

Source: American Heart Association

Overnight Baked French Toast

The holidays can be a great time to sit down with family and connect over a warm meal. This breakfast can be made the night before, which makes it a great recipe for Christmas morning. Fresh Alaska berries and homegrown rhubarb add some local flavor.

Prep time: 15 minutes plus a night in fridge

Cooking time: 35-40 minutes

Serves: 6-8 people

INGREDIENTS

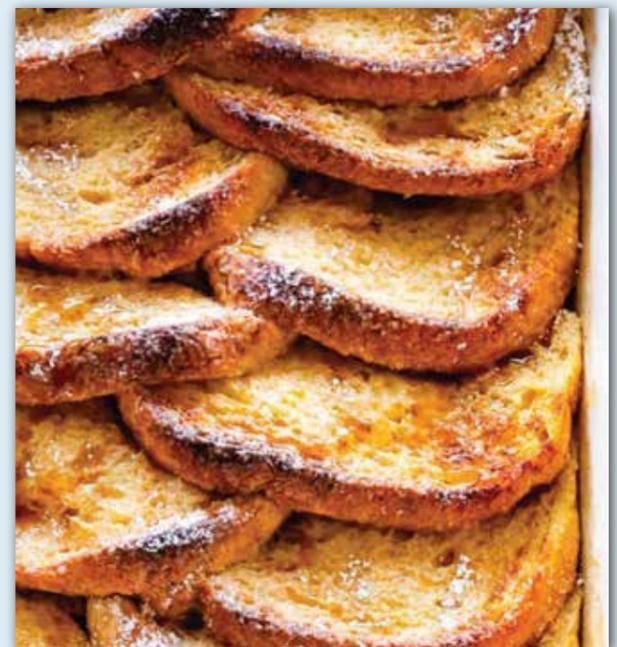
- ▶ 1 small loaf of French bread (or 1 large loaf white or whole wheat bread)
- ▶ 5 eggs
- ▶ 3 tablespoons granulated sugar (or sugar substitute)
- ▶ 1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
- ▶ 2½ cups of milk (or milk alternative)
- ▶ ¼ cup flour
- ▶ 6 tablespoons packed brown sugar
- ▶ ½ teaspoon cinnamon
- ▶ ¼ cup butter
- ▶ 1 cup blueberries
- ▶ 1 cup salmonberries
- ▶ 1 cup rhubarb diced

DIRECTIONS

1. Lightly grease 9"×13" pan
2. Cut the bread into ¾-inch slices. Layer in pan, fitting snug.
3. Add egg, sugar and vanilla into medium-sized bowl and beat slightly. Stir in milk.
4. Pour egg mixture over bread; turn bread slices over.
5. Cover and refrigerate overnight
6. In the morning, pre-heat oven to 375 degrees F.
7. Combine flour, brown sugar, and cinnamon in small bowl.
8. Cut butter into small cubes. Mix butter into flour mixture to make crumb topping. Crumbs should be smaller than peas but not as fine as cornmeal.
9. Remove pan from fridge, carefully turn the bread slices over and scatter mixed berries and rhubarb over the bread
10. Sprinkle crumb mixture over the top.
11. Bake at 375 for 35-40 minutes, until fluffy and golden.
12. Let cool for a bit and then serve and ENJOY!

Cook's note: Overnight soaking of the bread causes the dish to puff and become creamy when baked! If you don't have time to soak overnight, soak for a few hours.

Source: Submitted by Ashley Hackert from the cookbook: *Foods We Alaskans Enjoy*



REENTRY

Continued from page 1

will be most effective in successfully transitioning reentrants back into the community.

Graham used to carry a stigma toward people who sought out help. That all changed when he met Reentry Case Manager Ronda Burnett and BHS clinician Barry Hesson.

“It turns out, maybe all of us needed therapy,” Graham said. “I did. I didn’t think I did.”

The reentry program is a voluntary pre-trial initiative offered to medium to high-risk inmates by their probation officer.

If interested in receiving services and willing to sign a reentry program contract, participants typically begin the program 90 days before release—though that can vary depending on their sentence.

Once enrolled, participants get assistance in completing paperwork to find basic living necessities like housing, employment, transportation, clothing, career training, educational opportunities, public assistance, and childcare, among other things.

The program also offers behavioral health therapy and alcohol and drug treatment programs through BHS. After release, reentrants normally remain enrolled in the program for six to nine months before graduating.

Making a difference every day

Burnett was hired in 2019 to work directly with reentrants. She says that her experience in helping a close family member through addiction inspired her to help others. She retired from her career as a flight attendant in 2014 and worked with QCC patients for two years before transitioning into BHS.

“I really love my job, and I love helping people,” she said. “I strive every day to make a difference in someone’s life.”

Burnett typically works with 40 qualified reentrants in any given year. She tells them they can call her cell phone anytime, 24/7, and has been known to wake up at 2 a.m. to help one of her clients.

“I have a lot of success stories—in fact, more success than failure,” she

Tell us about your experience

If you are a reentrant willing to share your story or if you are interested in making a difference in someone’s life, consider contacting the Nome Reentry Coalition.

Nome Reentry Coalition

- ▶ Sara Lizak, chair
- ▶ 907-443-4362

said. “I’ve had very little recidivism, and I think that says something. It says something for them.”

After going through the program and getting sober, Graham says his life has turned around 180 degrees. He now has a steady job as the manager of his department and has been able to move most of his family to Nome. He



Photos: Sarah Richards

Top: Nome Reentry Program clients David Graham (left) and Steven Topkok with Ronda Burnett, program case manager. Lower left: Graham and Topkok, friends and coworkers, greet each other in front of the Wellness and Training Center in Nome. Both credit help from Nome Reentry Program services with where they are today. Lower right: Burnett and Graham sit down to work through paperwork together.

is grateful that he has a place to live and a vehicle to drive.

“I’ve had a couple of relapses, but through it all, they’ve been there. They’re here for me. They care about me,” he said.

Devin Bodine, AMCC district supervisor and probation officer, works directly with Burnett and agrees that the compassion reentrants are shown through the program is crucial to their recovery.

“I think that Ronda goes above and beyond,” he said. “She actually cares, and I think that’s something that shows in her work.”

Falling down but getting back up

Graham is just one success story of dozens. When Steven Topkok of Teller was released from AMCC after seven years in the institution, he felt disoriented and unsure of where to begin. He says that the reentry program has been an integral part of his life.

“To be honest, if I didn’t come here, I’d probably be back in a facility doing the rest of my time, maybe even more time because I wasn’t really clear-minded when I got out of prison. But then BHS came along and it made a big difference,” he said.

Through BHS, Topkok completed MATRIX, an intensive addiction recovery program, as well as the Red Road to Wellbriety, a similar program that focuses on Native values while journeying through the healing process. He said that he did relapse after going through the programs, but BHS was quick to act and help him get back on the right track.

“I’m just trying to use the tools that I learned from the program and try to maintain it,” he said. “I’ll fall back down, but I’ll get back up.”

Bodine says that one of the most helpful parts of the reentry program is helping probationers to find housing, so they don’t need to rely on NEST, the local night shelter. He thinks community involvement and collaboration has been key to the program’s success and has seen the results firsthand.

“I think it helps just for the fact that it’s just an all-encompassing type thing,” he said. “They’re getting help from all different directions, as opposed to just one avenue.”

Partners make it work

Arctic Access regularly collaborates with the reentry program to help reentrants with everything ranging from

financial stability education to finding household appliances and clothing. The organization specializes in supporting elders and individuals experiencing disabilities.

Denice Gilroy, executive director of Arctic Access, has been involved in the coalition from the beginning and says that the reentry program helps to alleviate the fears and insecurities that people often have when they are released from jail. Gilroy says that she has seen the difference the program has made firsthand.

“The more support a human has, the more successful a human will be,” she said. “It’s a beautiful thing that life is a journey, and we all get to choose what that journey looks like. Without the reentry program and without the support, the journey would look a lot different for a lot of people.”

Gilroy is proud of her clients for using the resources offered to them to better their lives. “We can open doors, but ultimately it’s up to them to take those steps,” she said.

Kawerak is another important partner when it comes to finding services for reentrants through offering educational opportunities, employment

Please turn to page 7

REENTRY

Continued from page 6

training, and support services. Their team works together to help people get the tools that they need.

“Everything is so individualized, so we spend a lot of time putting together a plan to talk about what those needs are,” said Kendra Takak, Kawerak Employment and Training director.

Takak says the services Kawerak is providing are not new to the region, but before the coalition was granted funding for a reentry coordinator position, people would often become buried in paperwork and overwhelmed with the process. Having an advocate has made all the difference for people trying to make changes in their lives as they build new life skills and relationships.

“Really, the heart and soul of it is Ronda. She just really has a passion,” Takak said. “She works harder than most

Having an advocate has made all the difference for people trying to make changes in their lives.

people I know, and she builds a real relationship with individuals so that when they come to us, they trust us.”

For Burnett, the feeling is mutual.

“I really couldn’t do my job without organizations like Kawerak and Arctic Access because we work together as a team, making sure that the reentrants get all of the resources that they need.”

Graham says that while he used to be an alcoholic and a user, there’s a sober side of life he needs to live for now. He is an adamant advocate for the reentry program and BHS services.

“I preach to my friends all the time. Go see Barry, go see Ronda, go talk to them. They’ll help you out,” he said. “I love them with all my heart too. They’re here for me, they’re here for you.”

Reentry Resource Directory

If you are seeking services or know of someone who might benefit from more support, reach out to a Nome Reentry Coalition partner.

Nome Reentry Program

- ▶ Ronda Burnett, Reentry Case Manager
- ▶ 907-443-3290 (office)
- ▶ 907-434-2794 (cell phone)
- ▶ Assistance in housing, employment, transportation, clothing, career training, educational opportunities, behavioral health services, and public assistance.

Behavioral Health Services

- ▶ (907-443-3344 (for non-emergencies during business hours)
- ▶ (907) 443-6411 and ask for Behavioral Health (for emergencies, on weekends, or after-hours)
- ▶ Counseling services for families, individuals, and couples, substance abuse recovery programs, and crisis assistance

Kawerak

- ▶ Crystal Taxac, Program Coordinator
- ▶ 907-443-4358
- ▶ Educational opportunities, employment training, and support services

Arctic Access

- ▶ Denice Gilroy, Executive Director
- ▶ 907-434-1682
- ▶ Assistance specializing in elders and people experiencing disabilities

Nome Community Center

- ▶ Rhonda Schneider
- ▶ (907) 443-5259
- ▶ Housing and homelessness prevention, temporary emergency foster home, alcohol and drug prevention, food security, family services, senior center, juvenile offender rehabilitation

Alaska’s Careline 24/7

- ▶ 1-877-266-4357
- ▶ Crisis intervention for individuals considering suicide, or experiencing crisis, isolation, or depression.

Baby-friendly hospital initiative is good for the whole family

Now two years old, NSHC’s designation as a baby friendly facility is no longer in its infancy.

The Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative is a worldwide program championed by the World Health Organization and UNICEF. Designated healthcare facilities are recognized as being baby friendly, putting a focus on maternal services and ensuring newborns have a healthy start.

Several departments at NSHC collaborate to ensure that BFHI standards are met, and the best possible care is provided for mothers and children in the region. The Infant Feeding Committee includes representatives from Acute Care, CAMP, Primary Care, and Maternal Child Health.

Stephanie Stang, NSHC Wellness director and registered dietitian, leads the committee, which also includes obstetric doctors, nurses, and certified lactation consultants.

“Being a baby-friendly hospital is not just for mom and baby; it’s for successful breastfeeding and bonding with the whole family,” she said.

Stang wants to show families that there are many benefits to breastfeeding in this region.

“It’s more portable. You can access it wherever you are, and in a rural location like Nome or in a village, accessibility is huge.”

Before NSHC went through the BFHI designation process, providers began implementing fundamentals of the program in everyday lactation services. Most notably, in 2014, the region saw an increase in breastfeeding for at least six months, with a jump from 36 percent to 54 percent.

“This really gave us the push to pursue the designation,” said Nicole Santonastaso, Prevention Program supervisor.

One of the ways BFHI has improved maternal and child health over the years is by increasing the number of training opportunities, and Santonastaso says the providers and nursing



Melissa O’Conner, Social Services assistant, and baby Norma benefit from NSHC’s baby-friendly policies. “I am grateful to NSHC for allowing me to bring my baby to work and being so supportive of breastfeeding,” O’Conner said. “I’m thankful for having this extra time with my baby to breastfeed exclusively. Also, thank you to my co-workers for being so supportive!”

staff in the Labor & Delivery unit are now better trained in lactation support. Doctors are required to attend a three-hour training and nurses complete an intensive 20-hour training on the baby-friendly principles.

In 2019, NSHC administration aligned employee policy with this principle by revising its Children in the Workplace Policy. Employees may bring newborns to work up until age four months. Workplace accommodations will be made to ensure children are not disruptive to patient care and are safe and not exposed to workplace hazards. The policy helps promote breastfeeding for the working mother.



Emergency medical responders trained for region

Nine EMT-2 graduates celebrate their certification advancement on Nov. 20 in the Wellness and Training Center with instructor Amy McNulty. The cohort includes three new EMT-2s taking the course as their initial EMT-2 certification and nine others who took the 56-hour course as a refresher. From left: Sheila Lake (refresher, CHA), Amy McNulty (EMS educator), Lyette Harvey (refresher, NVAD), Angela Eberhardt (initial, NVAD), Cody Martin (initial, CHA), Marissa Oxereok (refresher, CHA), John Washington (refresher, NVAD), Ida Lincoln (refresher, CHA), Pretty Buck (refresher, CHA), Crystal Fagerstrom (initial, CHA). Also trained but not pictured above were Rose Reale (refresher, NVAD), Aaron Cooper (refresher, NVAD), and Vicky Erickson (refresher, community member). Special thanks to Amy McNulty for instructing and Greg Walls, NSHC Air Ambulance critical care nurse, for his help with the skills portion of this class.



AS THE LEA

A POTPOURRI OF NS



Photo: Sarah Richards



Photo: Kim Knudsen

NSHC hosted a color run in Nome on Wednesday, Oct. 6. Behavioral Health Services, Native Connections, and Inter-generational Native Understanding and Abundance (IÑUA) staff members put together the fun event as a way to help connect community members after a period of isolation and distancing. **1.** Mark Hayward endures a blast of teal during his run. **2.** BHS staff Kara Ta, Alisha Rose, Staci Homelvig, and Hannah Schnaidt helped coordinate the event. **3.** Color Run participants sport splashes of color as they make their way through the course.



Photo: Sarah Richards



Photo: Susan Nedza



Photo: Emma Olanna



In honor of World Suicide Prevention Day, NSHC hosted a region-wide Suicide Prevention Walk on Thursday, Sept. 9. Several communities held walks, which was encouraged by NSHC's IÑUA program. The IÑUA program, established in fall 2020, was first named the Suicide Prevention department. The name was later changed to Intergenerational Native Understanding and Abundance (IÑUA) to better align with the program's mission. IÑUA translates to "spirit" in Iñupiaq.

4. Savoonga residents walk in solidarity through town to honor those lost to suicide and struggling with suicidal thoughts. **5.** Brevig Mission youth support suicide prevention through signs and banners during their community walk. **6.** Teller community members walked through town with a large banner of suicide prevention awareness.

LEAVES TURN

NSHC AUTUMN EVENTS

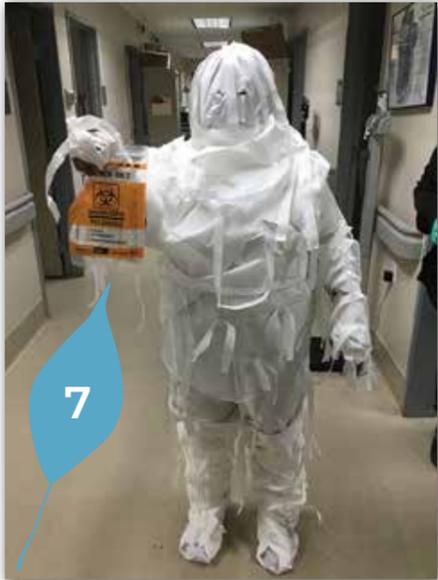


Photo: Cecelia Nassuk



Photo: Tulima Harrison



Photo: Kim Knudsen

As fall marched on, the temperatures dropped but the fun didn't let up. NSHC employees celebrated Halloween on Friday, Oct. 29, with a region-wide costume contest. **7.** Audrey Nassuk of Koyuk took first place in the Village Employee Costume Contest for a prize of a 15,000-mile Alaska Airlines ticket. **8.** The entire Quyanna Care Center staff and residents dressed up as 101 Dalmatians and earned first place in the group costume contest for a pizza party prize. **9.** Sean Knudsen took home the first place prize in Nome of another 15,000-mile Alaska Airlines ticket for his Loki costume.

Also on Oct. 29, several regional communities held Trunk or Treat events as a safe and healthy alternative to indoor Halloween events. **10.** In Unalakleet, Mori Jack-Busk, a 4th grade teacher, greeted trick-or-treaters as Cruella DeVille. **11.** Amber Otton, Jared Miller, Holland Miller and their dog flew through the Nome Trunk or Treat stations as super heroes.

12. On Sunday, Nov. 14, Nome residents bundled up for the Blueberry 5K Run/Walk. NSHC's CAMP department hosted the event to support diabetes awareness.



Photo: Kira Eckenweiller



Photo: Reba Leon



Photo: Katie Hannon

NSHC SCHOLARS



Clockwise from lower left: Amy Payenna, Kaitlyn Sebwen-Painter, Elizabeth Alowa, Beverly Tran, Ana Karmun.

Competitive scholarship recipients share their next steps

Norton Sound Health Corporation offers a competitive scholarship worth up to \$5,000 per term to qualified Alaska Natives/Native Americans.

Applicants must be enrolled in a formal education or training program that would benefit the healthcare field, and they must meet all the general scholarship requirements.

The deadline to apply for the Spring 2022 competitive scholarship is Dec. 31, 2021. If you have any questions, please reach out to Irvin Barnes, Tribal Training & Development Manager, at ijbarnes@nshcorp.org.

Meet NSHC's fall 2021 competitive scholarship recipients!

Amy Payenna, Nome

Amy Payenna's educational goal is to finish her associate degree in business administration with a focus on accounting. She has many roots here, with her husband and two children, her parents, and extended family, who

were all born in Nome and reside here. She spends any free time outdoors biking, hiking, camping, fishing, and berry picking. She enjoys her role with NSHC and looks forward to completing her goals and furthering her career in finance.

Beverly Tran, Nome

Beverly Tran plans on receiving her associate degree in applied business with a concentration in administrative management in December 2021. She currently lives in Nome with her husband and their three boys. Her parents and some family reside in Nome as well.

In her spare time, she loves being with friends and family, engaging in subsistence activities, playing sports, and helping with kid sports as much as possible. For the last three years, she has worked in the Medical Staff Department assisting Dr. Mark Peterson, NSHC medical director. Her next

goal is to take a break from school to enjoy her family, then obtain a bachelor's degree in applied business and continue working for NSHC.

Elizabeth Alowa, Nome

Elizabeth Alowa is majoring in legal studies at the University of Alaska Anchorage and raising her 2-year-old daughter, Pua Olena. She spends her spare time with her daughter, who loves the outdoors. Her parents are Lee Ann and Louie Green, and Joel Alowa, who are all from the region. After graduation in April 2022, she will be taking a year off school to prep for law school. Attending law school has always been a big dream of hers, and with her support system, she is positive she can make it. After law school she plans to come back to the region to serve our people.

Kaitlyn Sebwen-Painter, Nome

Kaitlyn Sebwen-Painter is a King Island Iñupiaq and was born and raised in Anchorage. She spends her

summers in Nome with her family and learning more of her culture. Kaitlyn's time at Fort Lewis College has been devoted to highlighting the importance of the well-being of Indigenous peoples from culturally competent perspectives. Her professional goal is to further her research within the field of Indigenous psychology and to enjoy time with family and friends.

Ana Karmun, Nome

Ana Karmun, a junior at Oregon State University, is studying business administration and organizational leadership. She is on track to graduate by June 2023. When not studying, she enjoys macrame, hiking, and exploring the Pacific Northwest. After graduation she hopes to work in Nome and give back to the community that has always been there for her throughout her educational career. Her next step is to enroll into a master's degree program.

NSHC medical director honored with national impact award

Dr. Mark Peterson, NSHC medical director, has been recognized for making a difference in the region. He was named as one of 23 to receive a Local Impact Award from the National Indian Health Board's annual National Tribal Health Conference.

The Local Impact Award is one of the NIHB's annual Outstanding Service Awards and acknowledges

an individual or organization whose work has affected change or impacted health care on the local and/or Tribal level.

"This year's Outstanding Service Award winners are an exceptional group that, in the face of a global pandemic that has entered their homes and communities, have risen to a level of service that is far beyond outstanding," said NIHB CEO

Stacy A. Bohlen. "On behalf of the NIHB Board of Directors, I give our deepest gratitude and congratulations to all the award winners and continued blessings to their communities and the people they serve."

Dr. Peterson has led NSHC's COVID-19 response throughout the pandemic and continues to provide leadership that is preventative, communicative, and responsive for

the entire region. He speaks directly with community leadership members to form response plans and provide guidance, spends countless hours taking questions and providing helpful answers to members of the public, and provides direction to NSHC teams. Dr. Peterson was nominated for the award by NSHC administration and medical staff members.



Summer interns delve into health care careers

Each year, Norton Sound Health Corporation hires summer interns with the purpose of preparing local tribal members to fill NSHC management and clinical positions.

The nine 2021 interns included (from left) Sierra Andersen, Talia Cross, Samantha Wade, Ana Karmun, Alexander Morgan, and Maggie Lyon. Additional interns (not pictured) were Rachel Turner, Kaya Schuerch, and Meagan Johnson.

The interns were able to accomplish many sizable community projects throughout the summer while learning more about the professions that interest them.

How to make schooling work while raising kids

Although it may seem daunting, it is still possible to pursue your dreams of furthering your education while parenting. Norton Sound Health Corporation staffers who have experienced it share their tips for getting back into the swing of schooling.

“Have your schedule written out and posted on the fridge, so that there are no questions of who is in charge of meals, kids, or other household tasks that day. Keeping organized is a great way to ensure nothing slips through the cracks when you are extra busy.”

—Kelli Breuker, FNP-C,
NSHC Health Aide Trainer



“Have a strong support system in place. People you trust to care for your children or a partner to pitch in with household duties or care for children while you are studying makes a huge impact. Time management is also very important. If you don’t have a strong support system, dedicate your lunch breaks, any extra time you have while your kids are at school or daycare and after their bedtime to studying.”

—Amy Payenna,
NSHC Finance Accountant II

“Keep a big yearly calendar and write down anything that is scheduled/needed to be done for school assignments, tests, midterms, and meetings. Planning ahead is key. You’ll never know what life throws at us so trying to stay ahead is golden.”

—Lakendra Barringer
St. Michael Clinic Manager



MyCache: The online scholarship program made for the Bering Strait region

Who they are: MyCache is a free service provided by a team of Bering Strait nonprofit and for-profit organizations that work together to make it easier for you to apply for scholarships.

What they do: MyCache provides you with a way to apply for multiple scholarships offered to the people of the Bering Strait region. You can use the money provided by the scholarships to pay for college or technical or vocational school.

How it works: Scholarship applications ask for a lot of the same basic information, so MyCache fills in duplicate answers. The only thing you need to do after you complete a MyCache application is answer a few unique questions for each scholarship.

Scholarship deadlines

- ▶ NSHC spring semester scholarships - Dec. 31, 2021
- ▶ All other MyCache Organization spring semester scholarships - Dec. 1, 2021
- ▶ All fall semester scholarships - June 30, 2022
- ▶ For graduating high school seniors - April 30, 2022
- ▶ Vocational Scholarship: Four weeks prior to the start of training
- ▶ Visit www.my-cache.org

Dual credit courses in the health field return to NBHS

Nome-Beltz High School students are once again able to take college-level courses in the health field during their regular school day, thanks to some renewed partnerships.

Norton Sound Health Corporation staff are among the instructors teaching the courses at NBHS through the University of Alaska Fairbanks Northwest Campus in Nome.

Northwest Area Health Education Consortium Director Vincent Vilella instructed two courses for NBHS students in spring 2021: HLTH F105 Introduction to Health Careers, and HUMS F250 Introduction to Behavioral Health. The latter course allowed students to earn certification in Mental Health First Aid, giving them skills to intervene and help prevent suicide.

NSHC employees are teaming up to teach HLTH F100 Medical Terminology at NBHS during spring 2022

Coming soon ...

- ▶ HLTH F105 Introduction to Health Careers
- ▶ HLTH F110 Professionalism in the Workplace
- ▶ HLTH F203 Science of Nutrition
- ▶ HLTH F208 Human Diseases
- ▶ EMS F152 Emergency Trauma Technician Training

semester. This challenging course gives students a deeper understanding of medicine and language, providing a great first step toward future health career exploration.

Health career-related dual-credit courses are planned to continue for the 2022-2023 academic year. They provide an excellent first step on the path to a career with NSHC.

NSHC Capital Projects focuses on clinics, housing

New St. Michael Clinic

Construction continued on the new 5,400-square-foot clinic in St. Michael. The layout is the same as that of the Shishmaref, Savoonga and Gambell clinics. Last summer, contractor Paug Vik framed in the exterior of the building. In the fall, carpenters installed the roof, ice and water shield, and windows. This winter, a crew will continue to work inside the building on interior framing and mechanical and electrical work. The clinic is scheduled for completion in fall 2022.

New Wales Clinic, Staff Housing

A new 3,900-square-foot clinic for Wales was designed by Architects Alaska using the same layout as the

in Wales. The design was performed by Bettisworth North using the same layout as the St. Michael triplex, which opened in 2016. Construction of the new triplex was also awarded to SKW Eskimos.

Shishmaref Staff Housing

Shishmaref's new clinic opened on August 30, and the old clinic has been vacated. NSHC is looking to purchase the old clinic building from the City of Shishmaref and convert it to staff housing. Administration would enter into a lease agreement with Shishmaref Native Corporation to lease the land parcel that the clinic sits on. NSHC will purchase furniture and other basic amenities to make the building com-

cent to the clinic. Bettisworth North Architects and Planners is working on the design, using the same template as the Savoonga housing duplexes. NSHC is in the process of securing land to lease through Sivuqaq, Inc. NSHC anticipates the start of construction in 2022.

Additional Staff Housing

NSHC is working with communities to identify land and/or existing buildings to use as staff housing in Koyuk, Stebbins, Teller, Shaktoolik, Brevig Mission, Unalakleet, White

Mountain, and Elim. In Koyuk and Stebbins, NSHC anticipates finalizing a design for new buildings in 2022 and beginning construction in 2023.

Village Maintenance/Morgue Buildings

NSHC has made it a priority to build morgues in communities where they are needed. Plans are being made to build the region's last three needed morgues in Teller, Golovin, and White Mountain in 2022. NSHC expects them to be fully functional by the fall.



Photo: Paug Vik

In October, the clinic under construction in St. Michael was prepared for the water and ice shield installation.

new Shaktoolik clinic, which opened in 2019. NSHC awarded the construction contract to SKW Eskimos, an Arctic Slope Regional Corporation subsidiary. Construction is anticipated to begin in spring 2022 and be completed by fall 2023. On the same timeline is a new triplex for housing staff

portable for staff housing if the sale goes through. Long-term renovations may also be considered in the future, based on need.

New Gambell Staff Housing

NSHC plans to build two duplex units to house staff in Gambell adja-



Photo: Reba Lean

And cut! Shishmaref Mayor Howard Weyiouanna, elder Elizabeth Nayokpuk, NSHC Board Chair Preston Rookok, NSHC Shishmaref Clinic Director Mollie Ningeulook, and NSHC Executive Committee Member Matilda Hardy celebrate the moment the ribbon is cut to the new Shishmaref clinic on Friday, Sept. 10.

Room for all in new Shishmaref clinic

The new Shishmaref clinic opened to the public on Monday, August 30.

Clinic construction continued throughout the summer with interior finishes and final touches by the contractor Paug Vik. NSHC Village Facilities Management and BioMed staff were on site in August to help local staff move furniture and equipment over from the old clinic and install and test everything before the opening.

NSHC also sent Information Systems staff out to install telephones and internet and to set up computers and work stations.

The new 5,400-square-foot is modeled after the St. Lawrence Island clinics, which opened in

Savoonga and Gambell in 2017. It replaces a clinic that was originally built in 1983, which was only 1,850 square feet.

NSHC held a ribbon cutting ceremony for the community on Sept. 10. There, NSHC President/CEO Angie Gorn explained why the new facility was needed.

"In 2014, we renovated the old clinic, and we were so excited when that project was done," she said. "But I remember coming to one of your annual meetings, and we heard loud and clear from your community that you needed a much bigger clinic."

The new space boasts three exam rooms, a laboratory/pharmacy space, a trauma bay, a specialty clinic exam room, a large dental suite, an office for the village-based counselor, an employee break room and conference room, as well as additional office space for clinic staff members.

The entire project cost \$8.6 million, which includes a \$300,000 increase due to COVID-19 costs. Of that total, \$2 million was funded by an Indian Health Services Small Ambulatory Clinic grant.



Photo: Matt Emrick

The Shishmaref clinic's entrance lobby serves as a waiting room. It will display local artwork in a display case for visitors to enjoy.

MEDICATION REFILL PROGRAM

Norton Sound Health Corporation is piloting a region-wide, medication refill program. This program makes it quick and easy to refill your prescription from your phone or computer. To connect with one of NSHC's pharmacists, visit the link or scan the QR code.



<https://bit.ly/NSHCMedRefill>

This service will only be offered during pharmacy hours:
Monday-Friday, 9 a.m.-6 p.m.

If you have any technical difficulties, please call 443-9591.
For pharmacy questions, please call 443-3319.



Enter your information to securely connect with the pharmacist about your medication or OTC refill



NSHC Drinking Water Lab now testing village water

Norton Sound Health Corporation's new Environmental Health Drinking Water Lab has now been open for business since March 2021.

The lab is certified through the State of Alaska to test drinking water samples from public water systems for bacterial contamination. NSHC's Office of Environmental Health successfully completed the state's annual recertification process in June and was awarded full certification for July 1, 2021 – June 30, 2022.

Lab analyst duties are shared by our three OEH staff, all of whom have completed required on-the-job training and internal proficiency evaluations, as well as successfully analyzing unknown "spiked" samples from a third party vendor.

Our lab receives regular monthly samples from seven area communities: White Mountain, Diomedede, Golovin, Savoonga, Saint Michael, Teller, and Nome. We have also been able to assist

the water systems in Stebbins and Unalakleet with urgent drinking water analysis needs due to special boil water notice situations. As of Dec. 1, 2021, we had analyzed 134 samples from the region.

We hope the region's remaining six public water systems will sign up for our lab services once their existing contracts with other Alaska labs expire.

In order for a public water system to begin using our lab, we need a full 30-day notice from the water system's manager of their intent to begin using our lab. This allows time for us to ship out sample supplies and iron out any remaining issues.

We charge \$25 per sample analyzed (just to cover the lab's base expenses) and accept samples Monday-Thursday, 8am-4:30pm.

Questions can be directed to our dedicated Drinking Water Lab cell phone at 907-434-0543, or to Racheal Lee, OEH director, at 907-443-3294.



Alicia Reitz, environmental health specialist, completing her final proficiency test by analyzing a set of unknown samples from a third-party vendor. This test is required before any lab analyst can process drinking water compliance samples. Left: Emma Pate, environmental coordinator, analyzing a sample from White Mountain—the first official sample analyzed at the OEH lab. The yellow color is from the analysis process.



New tribal environmental staff from Savoonga, Elim, and Brevig Mission attend an in-person training in Nome in October to learn about grant management and water quality. Front, from left: Susan Waghiyi and Tiffany Rookok, Savoonga. Back from left: John Pete and Ron Nick, Stebbins; Frederic Daniels and Jesse Nagaruk, Elim.

Grant management, harmful algal blooms and more covered at training

COVID-19 related travel and in-person training restrictions have helped keep people safe, but have made in-person training difficult!

Emma Pate, our Office of Environmental Health environmental coordinator, manages and provides services under our IGAP grant from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

A big part of services under this program is to provide technical assistance to the region's Tribal Environmental Program, with a focus on grant management and water quality, which typically includes in-person training.

Pate collaborated with Kawerak Environmental Program staff to plan and complete two in-person IGAP trainings in Nome during October for new tribal environmental staff in the region. Virtual Zoom attendance was an option for any who could not attend.

Training groups were kept very small, and COVID-19 safety precautions were followed.

Both sessions were a raving success!

The first session, Oct. 5-8, brought together tribal environmental staff from Wales and Shishmaref. The second session, Oct. 26-29, included environmental staff from Savoonga, Elim, and Brevig Mission.

The trainings focused on grant management topics specific to closing out FY21 grants and successfully transitioning into FY22 work plans.

Additional topics covered included harmful algal blooms, air quality, an overview of Kawerak's backhaul and brownfield programs, an overview of NSHC-OEH's solid waste management program. Also included was a mini-training on how to collect marine phytoplankton samples and analyze them for potentially toxin-producing species.

We are grateful to Kawerak's Environmental Program for helping plan and complete these successful trainings.

Norton Sound Health Corporation
Nurse Call Line

After Clinic hours, when you have an urgent health care need, professional and friendly nursing staff in Nome will be on the other end of the line.

Call toll free:
1-844-58-NURSE (586-8773)

COVID-19 TEST RESULT TEXTING SERVICE

If you get tested for COVID-19, you can receive your results via text!

Just text your name and date of birth to **833-413-0568**. Your results will be texted to you when they are available.

Reminder: If you have previously unsubscribed to this messaging system, you will need to reply "UNSTOP" to receive messages again, including your test results.

THANK YOU!
Thank you to the NSHC texting staff that responds to messages daily!

NORTON SOUND HEALTH CORPORATION
NOW HIRING!

For local hires & out-of-region hires, NSHC will be offering:

- \$5,000 hiring bonus (for hard-to-fill positions - not including relief)
- additional \$5/hr raise for direct-hire employees through May 31, 2022

NORTON SOUND HEALTH CORPORATION

For more information, contact NSHC Human Resources at recruiter@nshcorp.org

WWW.NORTONSOUNDHEALTH.ORG/CAREERS/VACANCY-LIST

Nurse aide students care for elders through local campus program

Giving back to the region's elders through hands-on care can be a meaningful and fulfilling experience.

The road to becoming a caregiver at Norton Sound Health Corporation may be easier to access than people think. To develop the qualifications needed to become a certified nurse aide, the first step is joining the Nurse Aide Program through the University of Alaska Fairbanks Northwest Campus.

Kari Hahn is a Nomeite whose goal is to attend medical school. She thought she would get an early start in the medical field by first enrolling in NWC's nurse aide training course, which is offered regularly in partnership with NSHC.

For two weeks in November, Hahn found herself alongside two other equally enthusiastic students—Joyce Ozenna and Tracey Iyapana—completing a safety aide training.

The training, a new, shortened version of the typical nurse aide training, gives students the tools to begin working hands-on with patients and long-term care residents as part of a medical team.

Instead of spending the usual six weeks in a training program, the students were allowed to get to work with their basic skills and continue to study while on the job. A State of Alaska Board of Nursing exam on Dec. 17 would determine their certification as nursing assistants.

The Nurse Aide Program offers opportunities to acquire basic nursing

theory and care-giving skills. Nurse aides work as members of the health care team and give hands-on care in a variety of settings including hospitals, clinics, home health care, long-term care and assisted living, such as Quyanna Care Center.

"I heard about the class and thought it would be a great way to jump into patient care, fill a need in the region, and get hands-on experience right now," Hahn said.

"This course has surpassed my expectations on every level. I've found out I genuinely love caring for our region's elders, and that QCC is an



Nurse aide students completing clinical hours at Quyanna Care Center, from left: Tracey Iyapana, Joyce Ozenna, and Kari Hahn.

amazing facility."

The care given by nurse aides at QCC includes bathing, dressing, feeding, toileting, range of motion exercises, monitoring of vital signs, and maintaining a safe environment.



Joyce Ozenna, a nurse aide at Quyanna Care Center, and Philip Dexter share a lighthearted conversation as she checks on his vitals.

In the two-week course, students also learn about the nursing process, basic body structure and function, supporting healthy functioning in all age groups, and working with persons who experience a wide array of physical and mental disorders.

"The class and clinicals had such an emphasis on human dignity and administering care," Hahn said. "The first priority is considering and respecting the person receiving that care. I found that really inspiring."

There is also a focus on safety and infection control, as well as professionalism and communication. The training includes theory, skills, and clinical time. Students learn how to perform skills practicing on manikins and fellow students during the skills sessions. During the

clinical portion of the class, students are mentored while performing skills on residents in a long-term care and assisted living home.

Ozenna, Iyapana, and Hahn worked as full-time nurse aides in QCC up until their state exam, which they prepared for with their four university credits of training, on-the-job experience, and a quick brush-up of skills. After passing the exam, they can perform the full job duties of a certified nurse aide.

Hahn's next steps involve working at QCC and refining her skills, learning as much as she can from the residents and staff, and finishing up the last of her prerequisites before looking into applying to medical schools over the next couple years.

Looking to get hands-on certified nurse aide experience and employment? Reach out to UAF Northwest Campus at (907) 443-8416 or email nwc.advising@alaska.edu to learn more about the nursing track program and regional training opportunities in health care.

New training program for home caregivers to start in February

A new educational opportunity may allow for more regional residents to be trained as health-care workers and able to work from their own home communities.

In spring 2021, in coordination with Norton Sound Health Corporation, the University of Alaska Fairbanks Northwest Campus applied for and received funding through the University of Alaska Anchorage College of Health Strategic Funding Request program.

This program offered funding with the larger goal of increasing the number of completers in UA health programs in order to better meet Alaska's healthcare workforce needs.

Northwest Campus received an award of \$159,000 to be distributed over the course of three years to help kickstart a regionwide personal care attendant training program in coordination with NSHC.

The PCA training program fits nicely with NSHC's new career ladder program for the Personal Care Services department. Workers are able to attend trainings and become certified in order to provide valuable services for care and comfort. The certification results in a promotion for the worker and advances the scope of care they provide.



Kristy Kuzuguk, an NSHC personal care attendant, assists Helen Simon at her home.

The first training offered in 2022 will begin in February. Attendees must apply by Jan. 14 for the 88-hour course.

To apply, visit tinyurl.com/PCA2022. For questions, reach out to NSHC Personal Care Services office manager Tierra Austin at taustin@nshcorp.org or 907-443-9603. NSHC has vacant positions around the region posted currently.

NSHC was certified in March 2020 to begin offering consumer-directed personal care services. Patients can sign up to receive care in their homes by calling Austin at 907-443-9603.

Long-term staff honored

Norton Sound Health Corporation continues its recognition of longevity employees with a paid leave policy. So far, 42 employees have applied for and received paid leave in honor of their commitment and service.

In 2020, the NSHC Board of Directors approved the Longevity Leave Policy, which is available to regular status employees with 10 years of continuous service who apply. When approved, recipients may take up to 12 weeks of paid leave—either all at once or intermittently.

NSHC is proud to recognize and celebrate the following committed and dedicated employees.

- ▶ **Dan Thomas** – 28 years of service
Health Aide Training, Nome
- ▶ **Anne Ivanoff** – 25 years of service
Primary Care, Unalakleet
- ▶ **Brenton Kunnuk** – 13 years of service
Information Systems, Nome
- ▶ **Duane Lincoln** – 17 years of service
Behavioral Health Services, White Mountain
- ▶ **Jared Trigg** – 10 years of service
Environmental Services, Nome
- ▶ **Maria Dexter** – 17 years of service
Tribal Healing, Golovin
- ▶ **Wendy Deering** – 16 years of service
Finance, Nome
- ▶ **Theresa Kobuk** – 11 years of service
Village Health Services, St. Michael

2020 EMPLOYEE AWARDS



PRIDE VALUE AWARD - KAYLA WONGITILIN
Pharmacist, Nome. Kayla connects with people in a way that inspires positivity. She is always in a cheerful mood and demonstrates professionalism regularly. She offers to help others finish up their work before she leaves for the night and takes extra shifts when the department is short-staffed. Kayla frequently works late without complaining. She cares about her role, her patients and knows what's best for her department.



COMPASSION VALUE AWARD - HENRIETTA IVANOFF
Community Health Practitioner, Unalakleet. Henrietta has shown impressive compassion in her role. She makes sure her patients feel heard and validated. She offers comfort by letting her patients know their needs are important, never a burden. Henrietta constantly checks up on patients and assists her co-workers. She is a great team member because of her willingness to help others and show empathy toward all.



ALWAYS LEARNING & IMPROVING VALUE AWARD - MEGAN TOPKOK
Community Health Aide, Teller. Megan has shown significant growth in just a few years. She began as a trainee and soon moved into a new role as a health aide. She went out of her way to help her community and clinic, including taking on new responsibilities like helping during COVID-19 testing clinics and making sure all patients received the care they needed amidst the pandemic.



CULTURAL SENSITIVITY & RESPECT FOR TRADITIONAL VALUES AWARD - ANNA MOORE
Registered Nurse, Nome Primary Care. Anna is kind, calm, and understanding with every person she interacts with. She is very knowledgeable about traditional and modern medicine and helps patients see benefits of both. Her problem-solving and people skills are rooted in kindness. She misses nothing and ensures each task is completed, down to the last detail, with kindness and competence.



INTEGRITY VALUE AWARD - ANITA HELSIUS
Registered Nurse, Nome Specialty Clinic. Anita is determined to provide a positive work atmosphere. She makes sure her coworkers feel seen on their birthdays and on special occasions and takes the lead when it comes to decorating the department on holidays. She makes sure any task at hand is done properly and efficiently. She cares for her patients and displays a high level of integrity toward people she interacts with daily.



TEAMWORK VALUE AWARD - CAROL CHARLES AND TERRI DOUGLAS
Director and Assistant Director of Village Health Services, Unalakleet and Nome. Carol and Terri work together to ensure the highest quality of healthcare services is provided to all 15 village clinics. This pair worked with medical staff and other clinical services to come up with creative ways to protect and respond to communities during a pandemic. They made sure PPE was available, oversaw the rollout of vaccinations, provided excellent leadership when communities had COVID outbreaks and participated in numerous village leadership calls. On top of it all, Carol and Terri are inspiring and fun to work with.

pair worked with medical staff and other clinical services to come up with creative ways to protect and respond to communities during a pandemic. They made sure PPE was available, oversaw the rollout of vaccinations, provided excellent leadership when communities had COVID outbreaks and participated in numerous village leadership calls. On top of it all, Carol and Terri are inspiring and fun to work with.



EMPLOYEE OF THE YEAR - IVIS HOBEL
Employee Benefits Manager, Nome. Ivis's hard work, positivity, and giving spirit impacted staff, hospital operations and the community response to COVID-19 outbreaks. Her selfless volunteering, shopping, food deliveries, and boosting staff morale have contributed to a healthier community—both in and out of the hospital. Ivis stepped up to help other departments in a big way. Whether in her normal role or the additional roles she takes on, she is an invaluable resource and an inspiration for others.



EMPLOYEE OF THE YEAR - BEDA PRENTICE
Village-based Counselor, Koyuk. Beda works every day to see to the needs of her village. She is there for every negative event and always provides support to others. She is loving and caring and dedicated to improving the lives of those around her. She works on and off the clock to improve cultural awareness and participation in her community. Her compassion shows through because she values each of the members of her community and is aware of each of their needs.



MANAGER OF THE YEAR - MARK PETERSON, MD
Medical Director, Nome. Dr. Peterson has been a tireless advocate for the people of the Norton Sound region. His leadership and foresight have allowed the region to experience one of the lowest rates of COVID infection in the state. He has been on every phone call, a part of every work group, has had a hand in every piece of guidance and recommendation NSHC has shared during the pandemic. Dr. Peterson's willingness to listen, adapt, and respond has saved lives in the region.

2021 EMPLOYEES OF THE MONTH



JANUARY - SHAUNA SEETOT
Clinic Travel Specialist, Brevig Mission. Shauna is respectful to all patients and is careful to guard their privacy at all times. She proactively assisted the COVID response team in her community and worked late on a holiday—even bringing dinner to the support team that was working 17-18 hours daily on testing, vaccinating and contact tracing. She went the extra mile to assure information was dispersed in the community and

helped ensure no vaccines were wasted.



FEBRUARY - NIKKI HUKILL
Administrative Specialist, Specialty Clinic. Nikki is a fantastic communicator—she calls patients multiple times to ensure they are seen and willingly helps with rescheduling when it is needed during weather events. She cleans the break room and orders supplies that are used by the entire department. Her extraordinary organization skills and the way she takes on never-ending tasks are so valued by all the teams she supports.



MARCH - WESLEY KOMONASEAK
Village Maintenance Technician, Wales. Wesley worked tirelessly to ensure operations continued for the Wales clinic despite challenging circumstances. When the clinic's sewage system went down, Wesley had doubts about whether he could make the repair. But he braved sub-zero wind chills, persisted, and fixed it on his own. During blizzards when the power would go out, he would ensure the generator was on. Wesley's positive attitude is a bonus.



APRIL - EDWARD JACKSON
Village Maintenance Technician, Shaktoolik. Without reserve, Edward was the #1 reason for his community's increased vaccination rate. He assisted without hesitation and even encouraged his community to get vaccinated. He picked up patients around the clock so that testing and vaccinations could continue. After a significant snowfall, Edward came in on Sunday to ensure drifts were cleared by Monday morning. His support and diligent work allowed a local provider to carry out patient care unimpeded.

Annual award winners for 2021 and employees of the month since May will be announced at a ceremony in January.

Community Utility Assistance Program moving forward

Partners working to bring water and sewer to villages

A new program proposed by partnering organizations could help city governments in the region provide access to clean water and waste management for their residents.

The proposed Community Utility Assistance Program (CUAP) is intended to empower elected leadership to carry out water and sewer programs with improved sanitation reporting, engineering, and governance services, all while improving operations by ensuring water plant operators are certified using more accessible training opportunities.

Currently in the pre-development stages, the CUAP's partnering organizations of Norton Sound Health Corporation, Kawerak, Inc., and Norton Sound Economic Development Corporation and grantors Rasmuson Foundation, Helmsley Charitable Trust, and Engineering Ministries International came together to propose a business plan for the next five years.



Photo: Laurel Katchatag

The CUAP pre-development team holds a meeting with White Mountain leadership to hear feedback on ideas for the community utility assistance program.

It is proposed that after the CUAP's first five years, every community's water and sewer utility system will be financially self-sustaining, and progress will be made to improve existing systems and to establish paths to service for unserved communities.

There are currently five communities in the region that remain unserved by piped water and sewer. Another regional community is considered served, but a large fraction of its homes is not connected to the local system. Many more communities around the region have aging systems that face costly repairs and financial hurdles. The CUAP will start by assessing each community's needs and creating a plan for moving forward.

While the concept of a CUAP has been under consideration for quite some time, the impetus in making it a reality was a recent grant.

In June 2021, the Helmsley Charitable Trust announced a \$20 million grant for improvements to water, sanitation, and hygiene in rural Alaska, with a special focus on the Bering Strait region.

While the region's sanitation funding need is closer to \$260 million, Helmsley Charitable Trust aimed to be a catalyst in making progress toward that funding goal. A large portion of its grant is dedicated to helping establish the CUAP. Engineering Ministries International is helping manage

the grant.

In addition to the grant, the NSHC Board of Directors and NSEDC Board of Directors each pledged \$500,000 on an annual basis for five years to support the ongoing efforts of the CUAP.

Under the CUAP, city governments will maintain ownership of the water and sewer utility systems. A community's membership in the CUAP will provide it technical assistance and support with administrative challenges and sanitation funding. Cities will continue to employ the water plant operators, managers, and clerks.

NSHC has several existing positions that support the CUAP and, once the CUAP business plan is approved, plans to hire more employees to implement the CUAP, including a CUAP project manager and an additional sanitation maintenance worker.

The NSHC Board of Directors is working closely with the CUAP project team to develop the business plan. Once approved, the next step will be recruiting a representative from each community, as nominated by their city government, to participate in the CUAP's advisory council.



Photo: Angie Gorn

NSHC and Engineering Ministries International staff meet with Koyuk leaders to learn more about water and sewer needs in the community. From left to right: EMI Engineer Travis Hogins, Mayor Wilben Napayonak, EMI WASH Program Manager Jason Chandler, Koyuk Primary Operator Kevin McDonald, and NSHC Sanitation Manager Sean Lee.

COVID RESPONSE

Continued from page 1

Of the region's entire population, 75 percent are vaccinated with at least one dose of COVID-19 vaccine.

Since NSHC activated its incident command structure on March 22, 2020, in response to the pandemic, the response and guidance has continuously morphed in order to keep up with new information and the changing nature of the virus.

While an early and longtime goal of COVID-19 vaccinations was to reach herd immunity at 70 percent of the entire population vaccinated, that goal shifted, too. When the Delta Variant came along, things changed. The Delta Variant has been much more infectious. And, even though vaccination protects people well against hospitalization and

death from the Delta Variant, vaccinated people can still occasionally get infected. The current goal is no longer eradication of the virus from our region, but rather control of the virus, by vaccinating as many residents of the region as possible and using current therapies, like monoclonal antibody infusions and soon-to-be-released new therapies like Pfizer's new Paxlovid anti-viral pill. COVID-19 will be with us for the long-term, much like the influenza virus. However, we will soon be able to control it—much like we do the influenza virus.

Regionwide, 60 percent of new COVID-19 cases are happening among unvaccinated residents. Vaccinated individuals can be infected with COVID-19, but the risk is noticeably smaller and the danger of being severely ill, being hospitalized, or dying is next

to none. Vaccination continues to be the very best way for us to gain control of this virus and keep it from killing people or making people significantly ill and overwhelming our health care system. If you haven't been vaccinated or boosted, please do so as soon as possible.

The state of the pandemic is far less worrisome now than when it first began, thanks to the tools now at our disposal.

Unfortunately, the region has experienced two deaths as a result of COVID-19 infection. Twenty regional residents have been hospitalized with the virus. We know these threats are real. Thankfully our region has been less affected by the pandemic than

many other regions, due to our high vaccination rate.

NSHC continues to recommend vaccinations and boosters as the very best way to protect yourself against COVID-19. We also recommend continuing face masks in public places and practicing good hygiene. If you feel sick, stay home.

By the spring of 2022, we expect to be in much better control of COVID-19. Between vaccination and natural infection, the region should have very good immunity. New therapies will help us effectively treat new COVID infections, and further reduce any hospitalizations and deaths.

We see a much brighter future—one in which control of this virus becomes the new goal. Please get vaccinated and boosted in order to be part of this new future.