May arrives within an unprecedented context of uncertainty during this time of COVID-19, but we are seeing hopeful signs for a successful “reopening” in the weeks and months ahead. Be assured, however, we are still safer at home for now.

I encourage you all to continue to practice social and physical distancing as our leadership team designs “the next normal” for the agency. Our leadership team is working on re-imagining our offices and the ways staff will interact as we reassess the work we do and the ways we accomplish it and plan for reopening offices selectively in the months ahead.

In the meantime, through May at least, we continue to stay at home, practice distancing, pursue proper hygiene, and exercise caution in our everyday activities until it is safe for us to begin reopening over time.

I am grateful for the way that all CMS staff members have willingly stepped up during the response and continue to provide for statewide service needs while also working from home to secure your own family situations. Thank you for continuing to provide the professionalism and expertise every day, even at a distance. The breadth and depth of dedication at every level of government is on display daily during this, our worst of times.

Let it suffice to say, I am humbled and deeply grateful at the response we have seen. In this newsletter, we highlight the recent work of the CMS Bureau of Strategic Sourcing (BoSS) team in ensuring that vital procurements continue to move forward despite the daily challenges we face. Make no mistake, the work BoSS has done is exemplary. But we are just as proud of all our Bureau teams at CMS and their collective approach and dedication to quality service provision as they redefine client needs based on today’s changing situations and remain flexible enough to deliver on those needs, often just as they arise.

That is really what true success in State and local government is about – demonstrating the ability to cut through bureaucracy as quickly as possible while following all required procedures, but focusing squarely on the needs of our service clients today and delivering on them despite hardship and obstacles such as we have never seen. I could not be prouder of our entire staff at CMS and the work done over the past 60 days, especially.

Even as the response continues, what we have seen and done already should inspire our hope and confidence in the future. We will get through to the other side of this, and we will do so without compromising our goals for a better Illinois. Indeed, we will build on those goals and our accomplishments, and together, we will come out stronger for our efforts.
In recognition of an unprecedented emergency response in securing vital commodities, supplies and equipment for State agencies during the COVID-19 crisis, the entire CMS Bureau of Strategic Sourcing (BoSS) has been recognized as the CMS Employee Team of the Month for May 2020.

"We are very pleased and proud to receive this team recognition because that’s really what we are – a 27-member team where everyone contributes," said Krysti Rinaldi, CMS Purchasing Officer. "Since this difficult time started, our entire team has stepped up as needed and helped out anywhere they could despite the obvious hardships."

The core mission of BoSS is to provide comprehensive master contract availability to all State agencies and units of local government to maximize buying power statewide. In the case of the COVID response, that has meant taking the lead and wading into the competitive fray for all types of necessary commodities from personal protective equipment (PPE) in health care to the necessities of everyday life in State government, from food to cleaning products and other business supplies at a time when the entire nation seems in short supply of key items, along with other goods and service needs.

This has been accomplished, of course, even as all executive agencies, including CMS and BoSS, were transitioning to remote work and distancing regulations even as the work of statewide procurement mounted rapidly starting in early March. "As a team, we have collectively had to learn to operate and adjust in real time to the world of remote work," Rinaldi said. "Through it all, our staff has identified creative ways to collaborate, holding weekly team meetings in a variety of ways, even using Facetime to connect if needed."

Ongoing and constructive communications have been the hallmark of the bureau’s success. "Staff has continued to produce high quality procurements while navigating the constant procurement challenges of identifying new ways to conduct bid openings and holding pre-bid conferences remotely," Rinaldi added.

The Bureau’s procurement goals have been accomplished even as 6 full-time BoSS staff members were deployed and dedicated to sourcing PPE for the entire State, Rinaldi said. "That’s a crucial point because the PPE need was critical, of course, and others on the BoSS team had to step up to ensure that contracts utilized across the State and by CMS stay in place, and that new ones are being procured in a timely way despite deploying six of our key full-time team members working strictly on statewide PPE procurement," she added.

The ability of the BoSS team to deliver on crisis needs at a moment’s notice is no accident. Rinaldi notes that BoSS staff members feature combined experience in procurement totaling more than 100 years. BoSS manages more than 700 contracts in use by State and local agencies and procured more than 400 in the past year. "Our everyday work was challenging enough for us before the crisis with just 27 people on staff to do it all," Rinaldi said. "But, somehow, these people have pulled together to give even more of themselves to help the entire State overcome this crisis and move forward in spite of it. We are very proud of the work this team has done."
The Benefit Choice annual enrollment period is now open and will run through June 1, 2020. During Benefit Choice, all health plan members can review and compare benefit options and add or drop dependent, dental and optional life insurance coverage. All plan changes take effect on July 1, 2020. This year there are many new exciting options including rate changes, prescription savings, voluntary benefits and more.

Full details about new rate plans and benefit options can be found at MyBenefits.Illinois.gov and in the enrollment booklet mailed directly to your home. If you have an email address on file with MyBenefits, also look for email information on Benefit Choice and MyBenefitsPlus voluntary benefits.

In place of in-person benefit fairs, CMS has developed virtual Benefit Choice fairs this year. Join one of seven virtual Benefit Choice fairs to hear presentations from our insurance carriers and ask questions live. Helpful tools such as a Plan Comparison Guide will be provided during these virtual events.

Cloth face coverings should not be placed on young children under age 2, anyone who has trouble breathing, or is unconscious, incapacitated or otherwise unable to remove the mask without assistance.

FAQs About Cloth Face Coverings

Should cloth face coverings be washed or otherwise cleaned regularly? How regularly?
Yes. They should be routinely washed depending on the frequency of use.

How does one safely sterilize/clean a cloth face covering?
A washing machine should suffice in properly washing a face covering.

How does one safely remove a used cloth face covering?
Individuals should be careful not to touch their eyes, nose, and mouth when removing their face covering and wash hands immediately after removing.

Click here to view a quick tutorial on how to make a no-sew DIY mask.

Employee Assistance and Support Programs

To support the mental well-being of our employees during this stressful time, both the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) and Personal Support Program (PSP) have expanded their operations. All services are free and confidential.

Personal Support Program (PSP) for AFSCME31 members
The PSP is a unique, union-based employee/member assistance program designed specifically for you and your family. The PSP offers services statewide through a network of licensed professionals who are specially trained to provide confidential assistance on a wide variety of concerns and problems. To receive help, members can visit www.afscme31.org or call the toll-free PSP number.

Employee Assistance Program (EAP) through Magellan
The State of Illinois offers the EAP through Magellan Health for all non AFSCME31 employees. EAP includes up to three (3) confidential counseling sessions, coaching and online programs to help support your emotional well-being. Learn more about all of the services available at www.MagellanHealth.com/member or call the toll-free EAP number.
Please join one of the virtual Benefit Choice webinars to learn more about new plan offerings and options during the annual enrollment period. To join the Employee Benefit Choice Virtual Fair of your choice, first, you must click the link (on line 1.) on the date in which you plan to attend below to be directed to the State of Illinois WebEx Portal. You should have already received your Benefit Choice Booklet in the mail, if not the Event Material can be found after you click the link and follow the instructions to enter the event password and then click View Info. To join the session, at the time of event, under Join Event Now, provide your name, email and event password and click Join Now.

No Pre-Registration required

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As a State of Illinois employee you are eligible to participate in an optional, money-saving benefits program administered by Corestream. These benefits are specially designed to protect the financial security of you and your family and are provided in addition to your core benefits. Click here to learn more.
The CMS Bureau of Agency Services’ Surplus Property Division has continued to support the State during the emergency COVID-19 response. The Surplus Property Division suspended normal operations on March 17, 2020 and in two days, converted their warehouse and parking lot to an emergency response center for the Illinois Army-Air National Guard and Illinois Emergency Management Agency (IEMA).

The CMS State Surplus warehouse became the central hub for the State of Illinois Personal Protection Equipment (PPE), Meal Ready to Eat (MRE), and medical supply reception, storage, and distribution.

Each day, the Surplus Property Division receives, 10-15 trucks with inbound deliveries, averaging 200-300 pallets of materials each week. Each week, crews package and ship 300-500 pallets of personal protective equipment for all counties in Illinois, including face masks, face shields, gloves, garbage bags, thermometers and bottled water. These shipments go to major hospitals, local health care facilities, emergency management agencies and COVID-19 testing sites.

Thank you for your hard work and support of Illinois’ first responders and frontline workers!

Events Recap

Earth Week Recap

CMS Celebrated Earth Week 2020 with a week-long schedule of educational opportunities and activities to support staff in their efforts to be more environmentally friendly. CMS continues to take steps to protect employees and the environment, including most recently updating our Green Cleaning Policy for State facilities.

On Earth Day, Kevin Dwyer, Director of Environmental Health and Safety hosted a webinar with helpful tips to impact the environment from home. Click here to access the presentation.

In celebration of Arbor Day, Deputy General Counsel Allison Macfarlane had a dwarf Japanese Maple tree with beautiful red leaves planted at her home.

Rapid Results Speakers Series

On April 29, 2020, the Bureau of Rapid Results hosted a Speaker’s Series webinar led by Rebecca Hunter, Former Commissioner for the Tennessee Department of Human Resources. The presentation covered Tennessee’s transformation to a performance-based workforce. Click here to view the presentation document and recording.

For more information on this newsletter or any other CMS initiatives, contact:

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