

**NEWS from the North Dakota Department of Human Services  
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**Human Services applies for disaster mental health funding; hires expert from North Dakota to administer services**

BISMARCK, ND – The North Dakota Department of Human Services applied late Friday for initial federal disaster mental health funding and has hired a nationally recognized North Dakotan to coordinate services.

The department hired Bonnie Selzler, Ph.D., RN, of Bismarck, N.D., on April 16 as the State Crisis Counseling Administrator to develop North Dakota's grant applications to FEMA and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). Selzler is also responsible for conducting training and for developing, implementing, and administering outreach and counseling services in the state once funding is approved.

On April 24, the department submitted a \$410,000 grant application requesting federal funds to assess needs and to provide confidential support and emotional care to affected vulnerable individuals. A second grant to address identified needs in affected counties and reservations is due in early June.

Selzler has worked as a national consultant for states and private agencies regarding disaster mental health issues and has served as a Senior Associate for SAMHSA's Disaster Technical Assistance Center. She coordinated North Dakota's crisis counseling program following the 1997 flood in Grand Forks and has taught disaster mental health courses across the country. She also has served on the faculty of several nursing programs and is the former associate director of the North Dakota Department of Human Services' Division of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services, having resigned in 2003 to work for the federal government.

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“In North Dakota, we help one another. The sandbagging efforts have been incredible. Businesses offered support, and students and others volunteered thousands of hours to protect their communities,” Selzler said. “We know that disasters affect individuals and communities differently, and recovery needs will vary from information to support and counseling.”

Selzler praised the American Red Cross, Lutheran Disaster Response, regional human service center staff, and other mental health volunteers for their efforts to provide emotional support to people affected by the flooding.

“As we begin to recover from spring flooding in our communities, disaster mental health responsibilities will be handed over to the state. I look forward to working with the department’s regional human service centers and other providers to establish teams in hard-hit areas to conduct outreach and to connect individuals to needed services,” Selzler said.

It is not uncommon, she said, for people impacted by a disaster to feel tired, overwhelmed, anxious, or even angry. Many people have experienced losses and individuals handle grief in different ways, Selzler said.

The state anticipates prompt federal action on its funding request. Selzler said once funding is approved, staffing and training efforts would begin with services to follow.

Selzler can be reached at the Department of Human Services’ Division of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services at 701-328-8920.

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