



State of Louisiana

Louisiana Department of Health

Office of the Secretary

January 3, 2020

Dear Governor Edwards,

I am writing to let you know that I will be stepping down as Secretary of Health shortly after the end of your first term. I would like to acknowledge how grateful I am to you for affording me the opportunity to serve Louisiana, to spearhead the expansion of Medicaid to hundreds of thousands of people, and for allowing me and my colleagues to develop so many initiatives to improve health. I look forward to continuing my work to improve healthcare for the people of this great state. Although I am excited for the next professional chapter, it will be hard to say goodbye to the Louisiana Department of Health. The last four years have been the most rewarding of my professional career. During your first term, the Department has confronted larger challenges, made bigger changes, and had greater successes than in previous decades.

Together, we have:

- Expanded Medicaid to ensure that over 460,000 working Louisianans have had access to health care www.ldh.la.gov/HealthyLaDashboard;
- Developed the first in the nation elimination campaign for hepatitis C and spearheaded drug-pricing discussions not only for Louisiana but also for the nation. This work has already resulted in unprecedented numbers of people receiving curative therapy for their deadly disease <http://ldh.la.gov/assets/hepc/prod/>;
- Led national discussions on maternal mortality and established one of the first state-run perinatal quality collaboratives focusing on maternal mortality. As a result of our efforts, since 2016, we've seen a 32% drop in the severe health consequences of hemorrhage in moms who are giving birth;
- Eliminated a decades long waitlist for individuals and families who need disability services;
- Integrated Medicaid and Public Health—with joint budgeting and strategic planning efforts that have led to health improvements. We have made our public health units the “orchestra conductors” of the health care symphony;
- Conquered infectious diseases—bringing HIV rates to historic lows and reduced syphilis and chlamydia infections;

- Passed innovative syringe service exchange legislation that has enabled harm reduction programs to flourish across the state;
- Created an Office of Community Partnerships and Health Equity, with the mantra “nothing about me without me” ensuring that we reverse engineer our initiatives with the communities we serve;
- Implemented an aggressive statewide opioid response plan and dashboard, and a Secretary’s standing order for Naloxone, which has been used by thousands of Louisianans <https://lodss.ldh.la.gov/>;
- Tackled cancer through the Taking Aim Against Cancer in Louisiana initiative, and ensured that our payers, providers, and patients are aligned on interventions that will save lives and improve outcomes;
- Served mothers and children who use our Women Infants and Children (WIC) program by reforming the program and implementing a new electronic system that better meets the needs of our recipients;
- Strived to make the Louisiana Department of Health a destination workplace—invested in our staff and fostered a quality improvement culture. As a result of these efforts, we have trained dozens of staff in quality improvement science while also improving the quality of the services we provide.

In summary, Louisiana is a healthier state with improved access to health care.

Some of the most rewarding parts of the job have been the most difficult. In particular, the Baton Rouge area floods of 2016 impacted many of our staff. Despite the fact that so many of our employees were displaced from their homes, they continued to serve the public, save lives and ensure public health. Our efforts to prepare for and respond to natural disasters have been recognized as a gold standard and replicated across the globe.

I am proud of what we have accomplished together. The policies we advanced are moving the needle -- policies that will result in more children growing up healthy, and mothers who can watch them grow, more individuals with disabilities living independently, and more families thriving.

I will always remain humbled by the faith that was entrusted to me by you and will always treasure the public servants with whom I have served.

I remain yours, sincerely,



Rebekah E. Gee, MD, MPH
Secretary
Louisiana Department of Health