



The Iowa Cancer Prevention and Safety Initiative

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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Aiming to combat the cancer crisis in Iowa that has emerged due to nitrate runoff in our waterways, entering our drinking water. We plan to propose legislation that will create rules and regulations to ensure the safety of every Iowan. In this legislation, we establish the 5mg/L health standard, which will require the Iowa Department of Natural Resources to issue public health advisories when nitrate levels exceed unsafe levels. Additionally, we will help farmers afford natural fertilizers that don't risk polluting drinking water by requiring a log of pesticide use per county. This will ensure that all stakeholders have a say in legislation creation, increasing civic participation, especially from Iowa's growing agricultural sector. These are our main goals to target the root cause of water pollution and cancer in our state before treating the symptoms.

According to the 2026 Iowa cancer report, our state has the second highest and one of the fastest growing cancer incidence rates in the U.S. Approximately 21,700 new cases and 6,400 deaths are expected this year. Melanoma, breast, prostate, and lung cancer are the most prominent, which are the most fatal variants of this disease. These are all caused by nitrates and pesticides. This claim is backed by a study conducted by the Iowa Environmental Council (IEC) that showed a relationship between environmental contaminants and increased rates of cancer over time. However, numbers don't tell the whole story. Countless people in our state are personally impacted by this problem. In fact, an article for Investigate Midwest depicts a rural resident, Chris Henning, who, upon learning that the history of cancer in her family was not genetic, started to suspect their exposure to pesticides. Sure enough, Henning recalled watching a flood tear through her farm, causing fertilizer and soil to go downstream, which later impacted urban areas.

II. OVERVIEW

III. HISTORY

A. Current Stances

People all across Iowa, even in suburban locations, are being affected by nitrate levels through rivers that supply drinking water to residents. Citizens in rural communities are the most affected, as they largely do not have access to nitrate filters for their water, since they can cost several hundred dollars.

Individuals who are impacted by this issue are not only subject to higher chances of cancer, but consumption of contaminated water during pregnancy may lead to neural tube defects, miscarriage, low birth weight, and premature births. Because high level cancer care is often hours away, this issue adversely affects rural populations.

IV. POLICY PROBLEM

A. Stakeholders

The ICC seeks to advance cancer prevention and control in Iowa through advocacy, equity, and collaboration. By doing so, they hope to create an “Iowa where cancer is not a burden.” Though we

haven’t begun working with them yet, our work complements theirs through our focus on legislative change driven by data, exemplifying their commitment of advocacy and collaboration. Additionally, the IEC, the largest environmental coalition in Iowa, is focused on equitable access to sources of drinking water. Our team hopes to collaborate with the Council to ensure that our efforts in cleaning Iowa’s waters is judicial and benefits those that need it most. Collaborating with these groups ensures that our efforts to clean Iowa’s waters is fair and is focused in the right areas.

B. Risks of Indifference

Research conducted by the IEC in 2022 reports more than 60 Iowa community water supplies exceeded the nitrate level of 5 mg/L at least once between 2014 and 2021, with 13 exceeding the EPA’s legal limit of 10 mg/L. The report includes a University of Iowa study that found a statistically significant association between nitrate concentrations in Iowa drinking water and increased risk of colorectal, bladder, ovarian, and thyroid cancers. Another study led by the Environmental Working Group and IEC found that nitrate pollution is a persistent and growing concern for both rural and urban Iowans, with

over 400,000 Iowans relying on water supplies susceptible to nitrate contamination. While the EPA sets the limit for nitrate at 10mg/L to prevent blue baby syndrome, Iowa's public health experts specifically point out that long term exposure to levels above 5mg/L is directly linked to increased risk of birth defects and certain cancers. These findings make it clear: current federal standards are not protective of Iowans' health. To protect our communities, Iowa must take action and enact research based regulations that put Iowa's health first.

C. Nonpartisan Reasoning

Because environmental health hazards and systemic healthcare delays do not discriminate based on political affiliation, but rather impact the vitality of entire communities, it is imperative that nonpartisan intervention takes place. The benefits of such intervention include but are not limited to the following:

- 1) Economic stability and preservation of the agricultural workforce: High rates of chronic illness and late advancement of cancer diagnoses can place an immense financial burden on Iowa's families, rural hospitals, and agricultural economy.

Protecting community health by using economic incentives rather than strict rules to improve environmental progress. such as providing tax credits and subsidies for farmers transitioning to natural, bio based nitrogen alternatives, safeguards the state's agricultural history and heritage, while mitigating long term healthcare costs. Ensuring a healthy workforce and reducing medical debt benefits the entire state economy, making environmental safety a highly economic priority rather than just a regulatory one.

- 2)Efficient Healthcare systems especially in Rural Eras: long wait times for medical specialists and delayed diagnoses strain the efficiency of the healthcare system, leading to preventable, severe complications like chronic illnesses or other conditions like pneumonia. Putting in place a "Time to Care" mandate improves organizational performance across medical networks by creating a patient triage and reducing emergency room overcrowding. By establishing clear operational standards, the healthcare system can improve and serve rural and underserved communities, making way for efficient systems that

benefit patients, providers, and any relevant stakeholders

- 3) Open transparency and community well being: According to modern environmental research, long exposure to elevated nitrate and pesticide levels has long term effects on public health resources and civic trust. Eliminating "civic deserts" through data water quality mapping tools guarantees all citizens a basic "Right to Know" about their environment. When families have immediate, transparent access to health data and timely medical appointments, community unity increases, ensuring a sustainable and healthier livelihood for generations of Iowans to come.

TRIED POLICY

Governor Reynolds' \$100 million "Farm to Faucet" initiative to expand city filtration facilities and state managed sensor networks is a reactive policy failure that merely treats the symptoms of Iowa's public health crisis while ignoring its root cause. By focusing capital on filtering out toxins after they have already saturated the environment, this approach shifts the multi million dollar financial burden of industrial chemical runoff

onto everyday taxpayers and local municipal water utilities through skyrocketing water bills.

Furthermore, even though they expanded water sensors that offer diagnostic data, they only function as warning systems rather than preventative measures, failing to protect the rural aquifers and private wells that millions of Iowans rely on daily. Infrastructure that was staged late, spending that permits low level, exposure to nitrates and pesticides to persist in the soil and food systems, allowing carcinogens to drive the state's escalating cancer rates. Actual systemic intervention requires the preventative framework of the Iowa Cancer Prevention and Safety Act, which implements proactive tax credits to help farmers transition to bio based nitrogen alternatives, cutting off environmental contamination directly at the source before it ever reaches the human lifecycle.

V. POLICY OPTIONS

Iowa Cancer Prevention and Safety Act: Iowa "Drink Safe" Policy

To advocate and raise awareness to people all across Iowa through educational workshops and town halls with farmers about nitrates and toxic chemicals infiltrating our waterways. Specifically,

we are planning to provide in person opportunities for 75+ community members at our "Farm to Faucet" Town Hall, where we will host a productive dialogue between regenerative farmers and health advocates. Virtually, 300+ individuals will be able to participate in this initiative through our Interactive Nitrate Heat Map, which will visualize statewide water quality data alongside cancer rate statistics. We also plan to introduce a piece of legislation during the 2027 legislative session that is called the "Iowa Cancer Prevention and Safety Act" (ICPSA), which will lower the nitrate danger threshold to ensure every Iowan has safe drinking water. As for the social media campaigns, information about this project will be available to people all over the world through Instagram and TikTok. Furthermore, we also have multiple partnerships in the works with the Iowa Cancer Consortium (ICC) and the IEC, which are central hubs for thousands of supporters and advocates across the state.

The Implementation & Engagement Strategy (The Campaign): Iowa Cancer Prevention & Safety Initiative

Our plan for this initiative includes 3 main phases. Our first milestone would be the chemical audit, which we hope to accomplish in July 2026.

With the connections and resources available to us, we will utilize professional lab testing to document nitrate levels in drinking water in 10 counties that are classified as "civic deserts" to provide expert testimony for our future bill. Next is the agricultural health summit: we hope to host a productive convention at the statehouse between the Iowa Farmers Union representatives and oncologists to finalize the Natural Fertilizer Initiative subsidy language. The final phase of this operation will be the legislative push, where we formally introduce our ICPSA to the Iowa House Environmental Protection Committee for the 2027 legislative session.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

Our end goal is simple: to ensure every Iowan has access to clean water that won't put them in danger by lowering the alert threshold and implementing regulations. Reaching that goal necessitates small steps. These initiatives include providing more sustainable options by implementing tax credits for farmers that use biofertilizers, making awareness initiatives, and introducing the ICPSA to the Iowa House Environmental Protection Committee. Tax credits for green manure offer a \$5.00 per acre property tax credit for farmers who use diverse

cover crops (like clover or hairy vetch) as their primary nitrogen source instead of synthetic anhydrous ammonia. To help educate Iowa residents about the nitrate water quality issue, we hope to hold around 1 workshop per month with a specific focus in rural Iowa. Additionally, we plan to launch an educational website on nitrates by August that garners over 1000 views. Lastly, representation is important; by seeing young people pushing for legislative change, it can inspire other youth to push for change in their own way to propel a movement that's both inclusive and impactful. Ensuring that all Iowans have equal access to clean water and reliable medical care is a broad initiative. Let's take the first step.

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