



Media Release

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Stehle's Knowledge, Leadership Abilities Land Her Medicaid Director Post Permanently

Today the Arkansas Department of Human Services (DHS) tapped Dawn (Zekis) Stehle to serve as the state's Medicaid director following a national search to fill the position. Stehle, who has been interim director since June 1, previously oversaw Medicaid's effort to transform Arkansas's health care payment system.

"Not only does Dawn have the experience of leading one of the most innovative Medicaid initiatives in the country, she also is a true team player who will value and empower her employees so that they will continue the successful transformation of the Medicaid system," said DHS Deputy Director Janie Huddleston.

DHS Director John Selig said Stehle stood out among the other candidates as the ideal person to oversee the Medicaid program, which is tasked with providing health care to hundreds of thousands of Arkansas children, people with disabilities and people in the first-of-its-kind Private Option.

"We were looking for someone who was not only willing to be a pioneer in Medicaid, but also a person with a proven track record of success," Selig said. "Dawn has shown over and over again that she can tackle new tasks and turn innovative ideas into reality."

Stehle, 34, began her career with DHS in August 2006 as a fellow working in Medicaid before landing a permanent position with the agency as a policy analyst in January 2007. She quickly rose through the ranks of the agency, becoming the DHS Policy and Planning director in April 2008. Four years later, she was named Medicaid's Director of Health Care Innovation.

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In that position, she lead the nationally-acclaimed Arkansas Health Care Payment Improvement Initiative. The initiative aims to create a more efficient and effective statewide health care system.

“I’m excited for the opportunity to lead such a remarkable team of employees. Arkansas Medicaid would not be in the national spotlight without their hard work and dedication,” Stehle said. “Together we will build upon the momentum they’ve created and change the system for the better.”

She has a bachelor’s degree in biology and social work from the University of South Dakota, a master’s degree from the University of Arkansas’s Clinton School of Public Service and is completing her doctorate of public health at the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences. Stehle replaces Dr. Andy Allison, who began serving as DHS Division of Medical Services (DMS) and Medicaid Director in November 2011. He left the position to pursue other opportunities June 1.

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