

Gov. Evers: Appoints Kirsten Johnson to DHS secretary

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MADISON — Gov. Tony Evers today announced his appointment of Kirsten Johnson to serve as secretary of the Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS), effective Feb. 27, 2023. The appointment fills the vacancy created by former Secretary Karen Timberlake's departure at the end of last year.

"Kirsten has a storied, 20-plus year career in public health and public service, including her time serving Washington and Ozaukee Counties and the city of Milwaukee during some of our state's toughest days," said Gov. Evers. "I have no doubt that her wealth of experience in public health, as well as her commitment to reducing disparities in health so every Wisconsinite can live their best and fullest life, will serve the Department and our state well."

Johnson has over 20 years of experience as a public health leader in complex local, state, national, and international organizations. She joins the administration after previously serving as the health commissioner for the city of Milwaukee following her appointment in January 2021. Prior to serving the city of Milwaukee, Johnson led the Washington Ozaukee Public Health Department for more than a decade as the director and health officer, overseeing the merger of the two counties' health departments and later leading a multi-county pandemic response as well as various other public health and health equity initiatives. Johnson also served as a health policy fellow and advisor for U.S. Congressman Ron Kind and helped develop policy for the House Committee on Ways and Means. Johnson's previous experience and professional roles also include serving as a program manager for the Healthy Wisconsin Leadership Institute at the Medical College of Wisconsin and as a health education volunteer with the Peace Corps.

“Over the past 20 years of my career in public health, I have worked to address the challenges and health disparities facing Wisconsin’s rural, urban, and suburban communities alike—disparities that were laid bare by the pandemic,” said Johnson. “I am excited and honored to join Gov. Evers’ administration to lead DHS, where I look forward to using my expertise and knowledge to continue this important work.”

Johnson has her master’s degree in public health from Tulane University of Public Health and Tropical Medicine and holds certifications as a public health professional and certified education specialist. She has served on numerous boards and committees, including the Medical College of Wisconsin Master of Public Health (MPH) Program Advisory Committee, the National Association of City and County Health Officials, the Wisconsin Association of Local Health Departments and Boards, and the Wisconsin Public Health Association.