

The Iowa County Magazine



September 2026

2026 Golden Eagle

2026 Excellence in

Action Award



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The Iowa County

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To promote effective and responsible county government
for the people of Iowa.

ISAC's Vision:

To be the principal, authoritative source of representation,
information and services for and about county government
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2026 Golden Eagle

Dan Cohen, former Buchanan County Conservation Director and ISAC Board member, was honored with the Iowa State Association of Counties (ISAC) Golden Eagle at its 2026 Annual Conference on August 19 in Des Moines. The prestigious Golden Eagle was presented to Cohen during the ISAC General Session.

Cohen began his career in 1986 as a naturalist with the Buchanan County Conservation Board and built their environmental education program from the ground up. He served as Executive Director of the Buchanan County Conservation Department for 22 years until retiring in December 2023.



Cohen spent the majority of his 38-year career building relationships, acquiring public lands, and sharing his love for nature through a variety of environmental education programs, including introducing children to the outdoors by leading a Boundary Waters Wilderness Trip each summer. Buchanan County elementary students loved his programs and referred to Cohen as “Dan-Dan the Nature Man.” Cohen was the recipient of the 2023 Aldo Leopold Environmental Education Award, which cited his lifetime achievement in conservation excellence and leadership.

Cohen held numerous leadership roles during his career including President of the Iowa Association of County Conservation Boards, Chair of the Iowa Conservation Education Council, and served as a member of the ISAC Board of Directors. For over a decade, he represented county conservation directors on the ISAC Legislative Policy Committee (LPC) and was appointed by Governor Vilsack to the Sustainable Funding for Natural Resources Committee, which led to the creation of Iowa’s constitutionally protected Natural Resources and Outdoor Recreation Trust Fund.

Dan Cohen has spent his life advocating for the value of public lands and educating the public on the importance of protecting Iowa’s natural resources. His conservation work blended grassroots advocacy, policy leadership, and public education, with a focus on ensuring Iowa’s natural resources and outdoor spaces are protected for future generations.

Friend of the Counties Award

Friend of the Counties is an award established to recognize legislators or other partners for their dedicated service and partnership with county government officials. As he approaches a well-earned retirement, the Iowa State Association of County Supervisors (ISACS) wishes to honor Senator Tom Shipley of Adams County as a Friend of the Counties. Senator Shipley is a true champion for rural Iowa and sees the strength and resilience in smaller communities and less populated counties. He always stood as a voice for their interests and understood that many issues can and should be handled at the local level. The ISAC Government Relations Team indicated they always had an audience with Senator Shipley and could chat about any county issues. Whether agreeing or disagreeing on any particular topic, the working relationship stayed strong. Knowing his dedication and witnessing his exemplary service, ISACS names Senator Tom Shipley a Friend of the Counties and wishes him all the best in his retirement.



2026 Excellence in Action Award

Excellence in Action is a competitive awards program that seeks to recognize innovative county government employees, programs, and projects. The selection committee is comprised of a representative from each ISAC affiliate and nominations are judged on the following seven attributes: innovation and creativity; leadership; replication; cost savings; increased efficiency; cooperation with others; and perseverance. This year the selection committee chose to recognize two initiatives.

The first recipient of the 2026 ISAC Excellence in Action Award is the County Conservation Leadership Summit.

Seeing a need for training aimed at new directors, several members of the Conservation affiliate began brainstorming and planning. From serving the Conservation Board, Board of Supervisors, and the public to managing employees and a budget, more specialized training was desired for newer and aspiring directors.

After seeing the success of the Summit, the leadership group decided to open it up for more experienced directors seeking a refresh. While providing a great benefit to new conservation directors, the Summit can also serve as a model for other affiliates looking to supplement their training schedule.

The second recipient of this year's Excellence in Action Award is Black Hawk County's Healthy Kids, Healthy Choices, Less Waste program.

When the end of federal funding threatened a longstanding Black Hawk County Public Health program aimed at health and nutrition education in the Waterloo Community School District, the Department had to get creative to save it. Seeing a connection among nutrition education, food insecurity prevention, and food waste reduction, the Department partnered with the county Solid Waste Management Commission to create and fund a program that supports school-aged food waste and environmental impact outreach along with the core nutrition education.

The collaboration has provided a program that has enhanced the previous offerings with something neither agency could do on their own. The partnership also extends to the schools and educators, health and environmental stakeholders, and Green Iowa AmeriCorps members. This initiative could serve as a model for other Public Health departments specifically and could inspire other departments to think creatively about new partnerships.

Congratulations to the Conservation Affiliate and Black Hawk County Public Health, the recipients of the 2026 ISAC Excellence in Action Award!



2026 NACo Annual Conference

Hot times were had in New Orleans, Louisiana for the 2026 NACo Annual Conference. Temperatures reached 100 degrees, and then some, for the five days we were there. The conference was spectacular, with so many sessions and activities to attend.

I was one of 19 Iowans that made the trip to New Orleans. A couple of us traveled down a day early to attend the Opioid Settlement Summit hosted by NACo as one of the pre-conference sessions. It was one of the highlights of the conference for me. There were presenters from all over the United States, with the most powerful one being a woman who shared her experience in recovering from substance use disorder. The description of her struggle with substance use and the initial hurdles she faced to find an effective treatment plan really showed the ways her community could have better supported her in making recovery and treatment more accessible.



Richard Crouch
NACo Board Representative
Mills County Supervisor
rcrouch@millscountyiowa.gov

There will be \$57 billion provided in funds as part of opioid settlements from 2022-2040. Iowa is one of nine states considered a split state because no institution controls more than 50% of the funds. Partnerships will continue to be key in combatting the opioid crisis. Convening county officials, cities, law enforcement, public health, transportation, housing, and even business owners will maximize outcomes and foster a unified approach. Presenters discussed the role of prevention in using opioid settlement funds and shared the model of prevent, identify, treat, and sustain. It's important to ask what is being prevented and what is being created at each of these steps. At the end of the day, we broke up into small groups to discuss what each of our counties is doing with our opioid settlement funds. We all came to the same conclusion that we are trying to figure out where, how, and what we can spend the money on. A final thought from the day is the life you save or help could be someone you know.

As a member of the NACo Board of Directors, I was asked to be an ambassador for the New Member Breakfast. This breakfast had over 550 new members attend. I had the privilege to have people from South Carolina, Iowa, Louisiana, and Kentucky at my table. Some of the things we talked about were CO2 pipelines, recruiting a younger generation for public safety positions, and data centers.

One of the sessions I sat in talked about how rural public health is at a crossroads and there are several problems that need to be addressed. Budgets in rural communities are at a stand still and the decision of how much of the cost to put on taxpayers is coming up. With tight budgets comes the closing of rural hospitals. There is a lack of new volunteers, it's hard to keep up with the new technology that is being developed, and costs are not being met by Medicare. This puts a big burden on rural services. I would like to have a program developed in school systems that could interest students looking at futures in medicine to be involved in community EMS or some type of volunteer public health position.

I also sat in a session on PSAPs. Many people don't realize what all is involved in a 911 call. PSAPs handle all types of calls from non-emergency to very serious emergency calls, i.e. fire rescue, car accidents, shootings, and a host of others. Keeping up with changing technologies is a high cost to county PSAPs. If you don't make the necessary change, it's hard to complete these calls and help people in your communities.

2026 NACo Annual Conference

The session I attended on data centers was the biggest one of the whole conference. The room was packed with 500-600 people. It was a very informational two and a half hours. We had three different round tables, and as I moved from table to table with different people and states, we all seemed to agree on certain priorities:

- Get an ordinance in place – look to see what your neighbor has done if you need help
- Consider electric and water use
- Keep local people informed
- Taxes should stay in the county
- Some states are preempting local control of data center sites, i.e. West Virginia
- Always expect the unexpected

Data centers will continue to show up so do everything you can to be ready for them. Try to be a good neighbor and keep in touch with them.

I sat in on the Agriculture and Rural Affairs Steering Committee. It was very interesting to hear about Louisiana and the 360,000 acres of crawfish they raise. It also has some of the biggest timber and wood industry in the United States. Some of Louisiana's recent agricultural challenges, like many other states, are how to deal with restricted use chemicals, fighting invasive pests, and work permit authorizations.

The Rural Action Caucus (RAC) met and discussed many different topics. The topics included health problems in rural areas, restorative justice programs for teens, doing more with less, and how to build a better county and get people involved.

Saturday evening at the Iowa Caucus, I was very surprised and overwhelmed by NACo President J.D. Clark coming into the room and thanking me for my years served on the NACo Board of Directors. It didn't stop there because next through the door was Terry Wilbur and Tammy Tincher to tell me how much they appreciated my years of service and dedication to NACo. Finally, Josh Pedrozo stopped in from the Agriculture and Rural Affairs Steering Committee to say thank you for serving and representing Iowa at NACo. I was overwhelmed.

On Monday, NACo members elected Coconino County, Arizona Treasurer Sarah Benatar as NACo Second Vice President. The NACo membership approved resolutions and platform changes to the American County Platform, which will drive NACo's advocacy efforts throughout the next year.

It was another wonderful conference, and I'm sad it will be the last NACo Annual Conference I attend. I will be retiring at the end of 2026, and the ISAC Board of Directors will be selecting a new individual to be the Iowa representative on the NACo Board of Directors. My time working in county government and being a member of NACo has been great, and I will deeply miss seeing the people I've met along the way.



Early Insights: Putting Science to Work to Improve Public Health in Iowa

The just-launched Iowa INSIGHT program is offering information to help Iowans live healthier lives.

For many Iowans, the long list of everyday issues has a worrying addition — cancer. Iowa is one of only a few states where cancer cases continue to rise; currently, it has the second highest rate of new cancers per capita in the country. But Iowans now have an ally, working to provide accurate, science-based information that responds to concerns about contaminants in the environment and their effects on human health.



Iowa Flood Center
University of Iowa
iowafloodcenter.uiowa.edu

The Iowa Integrated Network for Science, Information, and Geospatial Health Tracking (Iowa INSIGHT) launched on July 1, 2026, at the University of Iowa, and it's off to a running start. A generous \$5 million founding gift from Sharon and Kyle Krause supports Iowa INSIGHT, with an additional \$1 million gift from the Roy J. Carver Charitable Trust.

Partnering with Public Health

David Cwiertny leads the program with co-founder Larry Weber, director of IIHR—Hydroscience and Engineering (IIHR). Cwiertny also leads the Center for Health Effects of Environmental Contamination (CHEEC). The collaboration brings together two renowned research organizations to collaborate on environmental monitoring; biomonitoring; epidemiology and data science; and knowledge sharing. The researchers aim to close data gaps and generate reliable information to guide effective solutions for emerging environmental health threats, strengthening the health and resiliency of Iowans and the environment.

Collaboration with county public health officials is another powerful means to achieve Iowa INSIGHT's mission, Cwiertny says. "We've had lots of success working with county public health departments," he says. "They'll be valuable partners in what we need to do here."

A Crisis in Our Wells

One of the urgent issues Iowa INSIGHT is focusing on is arsenic in private wells. Arsenic occurs naturally in Iowa due to the geology of our landscape. The EPA sets a limit of 10 parts per billion (PPB) for arsenic in public drinking water supplies. Private wells, however, aren't regulated. Private wells in north central Iowa, especially Cerro Gordo County, are most vulnerable to arsenic. Well owners can have their water tested for free by contacting county public health officials. And a reverse osmosis filter can remove arsenic from drinking water.

"Arsenic is important because it associates with many of the cancers Iowa is vulnerable to," Cwiertny says. Research has linked arsenic to skin melanoma, which is more prevalent in Iowa than in other states. Some studies have also associated arsenic with lung cancer and cardiovascular issues. Cwiertny plans to dig into the existing data on arsenic in Iowa to help prioritize expanded testing in vulnerable counties. Iowa INSIGHT is not just about generating new data but also making the most of information we already have, Cwiertny says. Data can help us understand environmental health issues as well as identify priorities for additional monitoring or testing.

Forever Chemicals

PFAS (per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances) are manmade chemicals used in thousands of products such as nonstick cookware, stain-resistant carpets, and firefighting foam. Often called "forever chemicals," PFAS are persistent and have serious environmental and public health implications, including cancer, liver disease, and fertility issues.

With partners at the Iowa Geological Survey and the UI School of Earth, Environment and Sustainability, the team is studying how PFAS contamination of surface water can contaminate nearby groundwater and create a

Early Insights: Putting Science to Work to Improve Public Health in Iowa

health threat for private well users. Cwiertny is working to raise awareness about PFAS and identify vulnerable communities. County partners will be key to facilitating testing and getting the word out, Cwiertny says.

Sharing Insights

“Our first responsibility is getting the information out to the public,” Cwiertny says. Online data dashboards, fact sheets written in easy-to-understand language, and media stories will all support the outreach effort. In addition, Iowa INSIGHT will hold public meetings in all 99 counties to share research findings and answer questions.

Perhaps the most powerful thing about Iowa INSIGHT, Cwiertny says, is that it makes Iowans feel that their fears, concerns, and experiences are not being ignored. “We’ve got to do this, because it’s not getting done,” he says. “We’ve got to figure out what’s going on.”



Figure 1. David Cwiertny presenting water quality research during a public event.

For more information and to stay connected with Iowa INSIGHT, visit ihr.uiowa.edu/iowa-insight.

Applications Open: ISAC NACo Representative

NOTICE: Pursuant to the ISAC bylaws, notice is hereby given that ISAC is accepting applications for the position of ISAC NACo (National Association of Counties) Representative. The ISAC NACo Representative is selected by the ISAC Board of Directors.

The duties of the ISAC NACo Representative include attending four NACo Board of Directors meetings a year around the country, representing Iowa on the NACo Board of Directors, and serving as a NACo advocate and resource for ISAC members.

The ISAC NACo Representative is automatically a member of the ISAC Board of Directors and is expected to attend five ISAC Board meetings annually and provide NACo updates to the ISAC Board.

Per NACo bylaws, applicants must be an elected county official from a county that is a member of NACo. The term of this ISAC NACo Representative will be three years and six months, serving in the interim from January to July 2027, commencing their three year term at the conclusion of the 2027 NACo Annual Conference. A person may serve a maximum of three full terms.

This is an unpaid position. ISAC will cover or reimburse the ISAC NACo Representative for all reasonable travel expenses to attend the NACo Board of Directors meetings and ISAC Board of Directors meetings.

Applications are available at www.iowacounties.org. Applications must be received no later than 4:00 pm on September 18, 2026 at the following addresses, where questions may also be directed:

awoodard@iowacounties.org and cbiere@iowacounties.org

or

Iowa State Association of Counties
Attn: Andrea Woodard, Executive Director
5500 Westown Parkway, Suite 190
West Des Moines, Iowa 50266

2026-2027 Calendar

September 2026

- 9 HIPAA Webinar - NCO Series
(Zoom)
- 15-18 ISSDA Fall Jail School
(Holiday Inn Des Moines Airport)
- 16 Open Meetings/Open Records Training
(Zoom)
- 30-10/2 ISAC Board of Directors Retreat
(Clayton County, IA)

October 2026

- 5-7 ISAA Fall School
(Holiday Inn Des Moines Airport)
- 7-8 Fall IEHA Conference
(FFA Enrichment Center, Ankeny)
- 13-16 IAAO Conference
(Calgary, Canada)

November 2026

- 18-19 ISAC Board of Directors Meeting
(ISAC Office)

December 2026

- 2-4 80th Annual Iowa County Engineers Conference
(Veterans Memorial Community Choice Credit
Union Convention Center, Des Moines)

January 2027

- 7-8 New County Officer's School
(The Meadows Event and Conference Center)
- 28 Statewide Supervisors Meeting
(Embassy Suites Des Moines Downtown)

February 2027

- 19-23 NACo Legislative Conference
(Washington, D.C.)

March 2027

- 10 ISAC Legislative Reception
(Hilton Des Moines Downtown)
- 11-12 ISAC Spring Conference
(Veterans Memorial Community Choice Credit
Union Convention Center, Des Moines)

If you have any questions about the meetings listed above or would like to add an affiliate meeting to the ISAC calendar, please contact Kelsey Sebern at ksebern@iowacounties.org.

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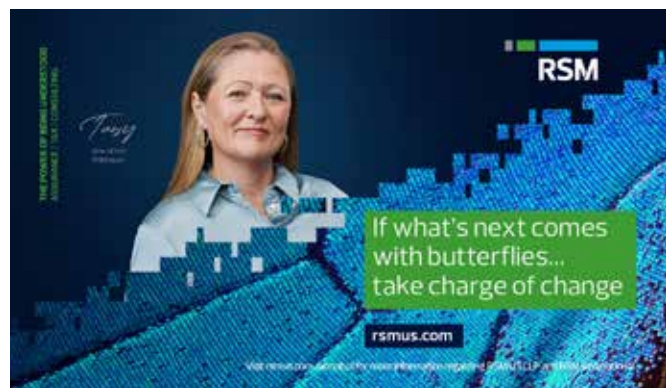
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Waterloo Fiber System — City of Waterloo
Photo courtesy of Elliot Tensen Photography



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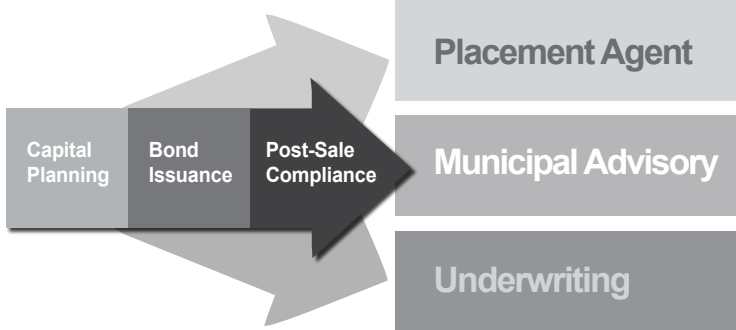
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ISAC GROUP BENEFITS PROGRAM

PARTNERING WITH COUNTIES ACROSS IOWA



Health Program

- Early release of renewal rates
- Experience and wellness discounts
- Multiple networks and plan designs
- 31 member counties



Worksite & Ancillary Program

- Group accident and critical illness plans
- Accident includes AD&D and wellness
- Voluntary Life and Voluntary AD&D
- Group disability products



Dental Program

- Comprehensive plan portfolio
- Voluntary and contributory pricing
- Broad network of providers
- 31 member counties



Complimentary ISAC Benefits

- Wellness program with Accident plan
- Employee Assistance Program
- Consolidated Billing
- COBRA administration



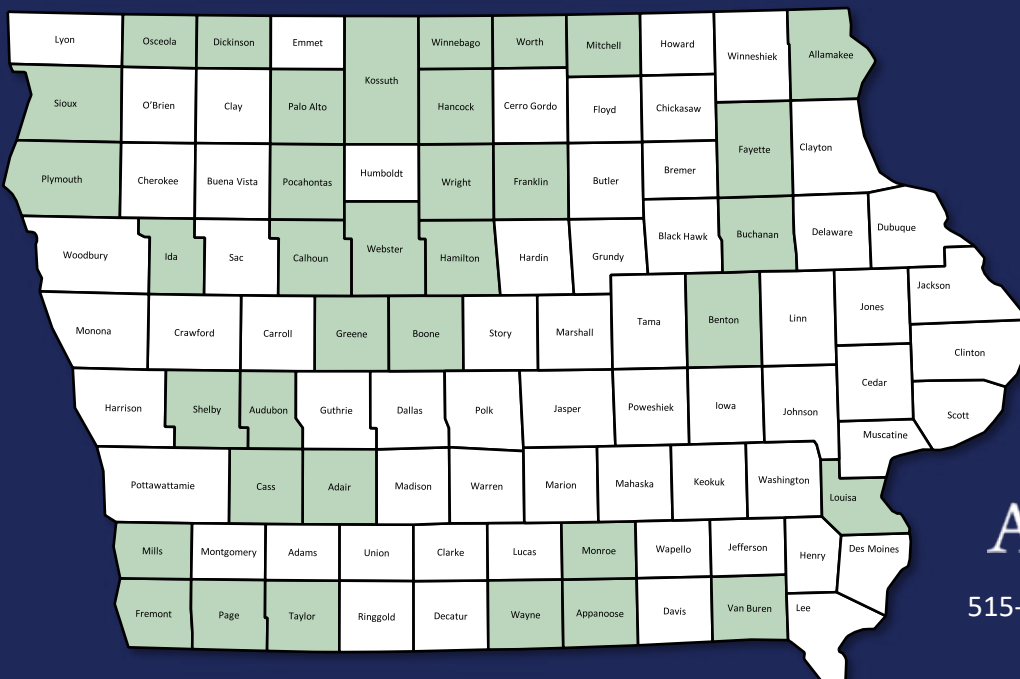
Vision Program

- Multiple carriers and plan options
- Exclusive fully insured county pricing
- Robust provider networks
- 26 member counties



AssuredPartners

- Employee benefit consulting
- Dedicated county service team
- Compliance assistance
- Online benefits enrollment platform



Current ISAC Counties


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