



Matt Highland

Chief of Strategic Operations

Matt Highland serves as the Chief of Strategic Operations for the Iowa Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). In this role, he oversees the Division of Strategic Operations which includes government relations, media relations, operational communications, the health equity office, refugee services, performance and transformation and the Director’s administrative support team. Highland provides strategic leadership to the agency to ensure its internal and external engagement strategies align with the department’s mission and programmatic goals.

Highland previously worked as the Public Information Officer for DHS, where he honed highly specialized skills in public relations, responsible for media relations dealing with high-profile topics and sensitive subjects. Due to DHS’ size and scope of programs, he has been in continuous engagement with media, legislators and stakeholders on a broad range of critical issues. Prior to this role, Highland served as the Communications Specialist for Iowa Medicaid, focused on operational communications, and as Communications Director for an independent newspaper in Southern California.

Highland shares with Director Garcia a strong vision for open and proactive communication. “Throughout my time at the department, I have made great efforts to improve our relationship with media and legislators to enhance our public perception. This is challenging, but important work that I’m proud to be a part of. So many Iowans rely on our critical services and programs—clear and open communication is key to our collective success,” said Highland

Highland received a Bachelor’s Degree in Communication Arts at Otis College of Art and Design in Los Angeles and a Master’s Degree in Political Science from California State University in Long Beach. An Iowa native, Highland returned to Des Moines with his husband Rusty, after nearly 15 years living in the Greater Los Angeles Area. Highland has been with the agency since 2015.