

## Housing need for COVID-19 test-takers grows

Written by By Beth Blakeman Associate Editor  
Friday, 24 April 2020 08:31

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### Two more hotels join the effort to help

Na' Nihzhoozhi Center Inc. detox center closed its doors April 14 due to an outbreak and the spread of COVID-19 among employees and clients.

The shelter, located in the same building, which holds from 20-30 people, remains open for now.

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Gallup City Manager Maryann Ustick says the detox center staff was exposed to a person who was positive for COVID-19. The individual visited the center three separate times and exposed as many as 170 people.

“When they found out, they tested as many people as they could. But they are still looking for others [who were] exposed, but can’t find them,” she said

The NCI staff was tested. Some members are sick and some are in self-quarantine. But Ustick said the staff has been reduced from 37 to about four people.

What happens to the people who would normally be taken in to the NCI detox center?

Ustick says they go to the Gallup Indian Medical Center, where they detox and stay until they are ready for release. In some cases, she says, people who detox in the hospital will be sent to a hotel participating in housing patients for quarantine purposes and COVID-19 test results.

But the number of housing locations for quarantine is small.

“We are in process of searching for another option, an alternative site that would allow them to keep people separate, so they wouldn’t be exposed to each other,” Ustick said. “That’s the problem with NCI. It isn’t individual and separate. It’s pretty much an open space.”

One of the places people in Gallup might be sent to for quarantine or to await COVID-19 test results is the Ranch House Motel, which opened 20 rooms to homeless people. The hurdles of getting things going are mostly cleared out of the way now.

“Things are going wonderful. We’ve been doing this about four weeks, so we pretty much have it down to a science,” hotel manager Teena Carney told the *Gallup Sun* April 15.

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In addition to housing people in the motel, Carney has been providing services to help create more area locations for transients and homeless people getting tested.

“I’ve conferenced and trained about three other hotels in New Mexico,” she said.

One of those hotels was the Motel 6, owned by Dist. 3 City Councilor Yogash Kumar.

Motel 6 in Gallup has 80 rooms. Kumar says the Motel 6 has made 40 rooms available for people awaiting COVID-19 test results. He says the 40 rooms being used for homeless people are located together in a separate building.

“It has been open about three days,” he said April 14. “Initially it’s pretty smooth. The front desk has no interaction whatsoever with these patients. They are using the back building.”

Kumar said he has an agreement with the New Mexico Department of Health, Rehoboth McKinley Christian Health Care Services and the Gallup Indian Medical Center. The plan as he described it would have people staying at Motel 6 for about three days, or until their test results come back.

The Motel 6 has a similar contract to that of the Ranch House Motel. Lodging there is being charged at \$47 per night plus lodging taxes, with funds being paid from the state emergency funds allocated by Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham in Executive Order 2020-008. Motel 6 occupants’ meals will be provided by the Ranch House Motel which receives \$23 per day for meals.

Ina Burmeister, RMCHCS public information officer, who first proposed the idea of using Motel 6 to Kumar, said the idea is to use these respiratory shelters to keep people safe.

But when they are medically cleared, she said there is a process in place to release them.

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“If there is a patient that is COVID positive, they get a second assessment from a nurse. If they are symptom free, the nurse gives them clearance to leave,” she explained. “The hotel is contacted and security is told.”

Kumar said he is not involved with the release in any way.

“I just provide the room. We want minimal exposure,” he said

However, Kumar is involved in another way. He has agreed to house the doctors and nurses who will be working at the field hospital set up in the Miyamura High School gymnasium at his Comfort Suites hotel.

Burmeister was the initiator on this project, too.

“We left it open-ended,” she said. “I don’t know exactly the number of staff members that will be sent to Gallup. They aren’t coming until April 20 or 21.”

Burmeister reached out about Comfort Suites on April 6 and Kumar reserved 20 rooms there.

The services being offered to the medical professionals at Comfort Suites will include a fitness center, laundry room, internet and a grab-and-go breakfast each morning. Comfort Suites manager Ken Riege says the hotel is following all the proper procedures to clean the rooms and other areas that will be used.

“The medical staff will be kept on a specific floor. The medical staff will be eating in their rooms,” he said

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Riege expressed hope and confidence about the venture.

“We’re all in it together to conquer this enemy and come through on the other side. We’re going to come through it even a stronger community than we were before,” he said.

Ranch House Motel, Motel 6, Comfort Suites and Miyamura High School are only some of the Gallup sites working to flatten the curve. It’s reported that Howard Johnson’s hotel on Gallup’s west end will also offer assistance.

Another of the participants in the effort is St. Joseph’s Shelter and Soup Kitchen which reopened March 30. Adrian King, who manages one side of the operation, says the shelter has 17 beds. But there’s a process to get one for the night.

King says people who want a bed, must first follow the rules to get a meal.

“We do a daily screening with the people that come and get food. We talk to each individual before they get fed. They have to take the screening to get a meal. Their first and last name, age,” he said. “We ask if they have any symptoms such as fever, cough, shortness of breath. We ask if they think they might have been exposed to anybody with coronavirus.”

Passing the screening means a meal, and if there is a bed available, a change of clothes, a shower, and a clean bedroll.

The 17 beds are 6 feet apart and cleaned daily. However, the shelter does not leave the rooms empty for 24 hours in between stays. People who stay there often change nightly, something which leaves Gallup vulnerable to community spread.

Other options continue to be needed. One of those could be at NCI.

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Ustick told the Gallup Sun April 16 that city staff, the state and NCI are hard at work on a solution to reopen the NCI detox center, possibly as soon as this weekend.

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