

Governor holds health care roundtable in Gallup

Written by By Beth Blakeman Managing Editor
Friday, 17 September 2021 03:43



During a by-invitation-only meeting Sept. 7, Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham talked to Gallup and McKinley County health care officials and local dignitaries about how the region was coping during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The governor and her staff sat down with Gallup Mayor Louis Bonaguidi, Rep. Patty Lundstrom, D-Gallup, Sen. George Muñoz, D-Gallup, Rep. D. Wonda Johnson, D-Rehoboth, and representatives of Rehoboth McKinley Christian Health Care Services and the Gallup Indian Medical Center among others.

The governor recognized the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the region, noting that it became one of the nation's epicenters of the early pandemic.

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She also mentioned that McKinley County still has the highest rate of total cases per 100,000 people and that it is also a leader in vaccinations, second only to Los Alamos County for the percentage of those eligible who have been fully vaccinated.

Officials at the roundtable discussed the area's many health care concerns and needs and how the state can partner with local entities to address access to and quality of care, as well as the underlying issues contributing to negative health outcomes.

Lundstrom told the *Sun* she raised the issue about Gallup being a central location for diabetes. "We have dialysis that's running 24-7," she pointed out.

The governor talked about making the Gallup area a Center of Excellence around diabetes, evaluating challenges and focusing resources to turn things around.

The governor introduced legislation creating Centers of Excellence in her first year as governor (2019). She described them as hubs of innovation to foster global collaboration and draw talented researchers and students to New Mexico.

Centers of Excellence in higher education, cybersecurity, and nursing are only a few of those that exist across the state.

Lundstrom said she is interested in working with the governor and her staff next session to address diabetes. She hopes to get a memorial put in place to help determine what the cost would be for such an endeavor.

Bonaguidi came away with the impression that the governor is paying attention to the issues the region is grappling with. He said she's been keeping up with what's happening at the Lexington Hotel and Four Corners Detox Recovery Center.

Muñoz said the governor talked about where to spend federal COVID dollars and acknowledged

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the need for doctors and nurses in the area.

Lundstrom said the governor mentioned the possibility of writing a letter to the federal government to bring FEMA [Federal Emergency Management Agency] nurses to Gallup and McKinley County.

“We know that poverty is a significant driver of health outcomes,” Lujan Grisham said. “And we know that McKinley County faces some of the most challenging health circumstances in our state — a high rate of alcohol-related deaths, a high rate of diabetes and a high rate of food insecurity.”

She went on to express her gratitude for the ongoing hard work in the community and to tell residents that the state will explore every avenue for health care investments.

By Beth Blakeman
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