

Native American communities hit hard by COVID-19

Written by By Teresa Gomez, Member, beWellnm Board of Directors
Friday, 29 May 2020 03:44



COVID-19 has hit Native American communities harder than most. As a member of Isleta Pueblo, I am deeply concerned. Currently, the New Mexico Department of Health's website reports that Native Americans account for nearly 50 percent of our state's COVID-19 cases, and there is no telling what that number could be by the time you read this.

To make matters even worse, the Native population also has the highest uninsured rate in New Mexico.

As a lifelong advocate for the health and well-being of Native Americans, I worry that many of our community members will not have access to the healthcare they may need during this pandemic. At beWellnm, we want to make sure Native Americans have appropriate health insurance that covers the ten essential health benefits required by the federal government.

No matter what, every Native American in New Mexico qualifies for health coverage, either through Medicaid or beWellnm, the New Mexico Health Insurance Exchange. Both options are a great complement to care provided by Indian Health Service.

Depending upon income and family size, Native Americans may be able to qualify for Medicaid through the New Mexico Human Services Department. Generally, individuals who make \$1,468 a month or less will qualify for Medicaid, but that amount could be higher based on family size.

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For those who don't qualify for Medicaid, there is the opportunity to enroll in a qualified health plan through beWellnm, today. Unlike the rest of the population, Native Americans can enroll in coverage all year long. Native Americans also have access to free and low-cost plans and can visit any in-network doctor throughout the state.

Furthermore, no one with a health plan through beWellnm has to worry about being covered during COVID-19. New Mexico's Superintendent of Insurance issued a rule in March that mandates any insurance carrier to cover testing and treatment for COVID-19.

As a cancer survivor, I cannot stress enough the importance of having health coverage. I know that if I had not been on a health insurance plan, when I became sick, I would not have been able to pay for the care I needed. I encourage every uninsured Native American to contact either Medicaid or beWellnm to find out which option is best for them. It's more important than ever for our communities to get covered.

By Teresa Gomez,
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