



2021 Statewide Conference Building a Culture of Health Highlights

Thanks to all who made our first statewide conference a success! Special thanks to the health councils who shared their remarkable stories of community engagement and to our legislative panel members who expressed their support for community and tribal health councils and our critical role in ensuring equitable health access and outcomes.

Morning Session - Health Council Presentations

The morning session featured a welcome by Dr. Laura Parajon, Deputy Secretary of Health, followed by presentations by six of the health councils participating in the Culture of Health Initiative.

Pueblo of Acoma Health Council Organization reported on "Our Fight Against COVID-19." Many stepped up to protect and safeguard the community. The Health Council flooded the Pueblo with information about the status of COVID in the community, about testing, masking, and vaccinations, and about resources to meet basic needs, including food and water. For more information, contact Kari Vallo at kvallo@poamail.org.

Tesuque Pueblo highlighted the work of their Pueblo of Tesuque Youth Coalition on youth suicide prevention, a priority for the Pueblo. PTYC members were trained in leadership, team building, and public speaking and organized youth summits and community service events. Tesuque will be the first elementary school in NM to train students in Yellow Ribbon Ask 4 Help! Contact Gerilyn Antonio, gerilyn@nmhealthcouncils.org.

Socorro County Options, Prevention and Education (SCOPE) reported on the many ways health council members were meeting community needs during COVID. SCOPE expanded Socorro's Community Garden and worked with the Alamo Navajo Wellness Center to implement a new community garden, providing access to fresh food and opportunities to learn about healthy eating options. For more information, contact Samantha Winter at coordinator@scopehealthcouncil.com

Lincoln/Otero County Health Councils built on their history of collaboration to prevent unnecessary incarceration and reduce racial disparities. The project brings Otero County's Mobile Crisis Response Team to Lincoln County and the Mescalero Apache Tribe. For more information, contact Shannon Dictson, lincolncountyhc@gmail.com, Ursala Bowe, Occhc.coordinator@gmail.com, or Holly Mata, hjmata@nmsu.edu

Luna County Community Health Council serves a small, rural/frontier community on the US/Mexican border. They have forged partnerships across the border as well as with the many organizations within the county. These partnerships came together in May 2018 to serve over 10,000 people seeking asylum who arrived in Deming. Every day 800 students, US citizens living in Mexico, cross the border to attend school in Deming. Since 2014, the Health Council has published an annual Activities Guide, distributed to all students. For more information, contact Edith Vazquez at edith_vazquez@lunacountynm.us.

McKinley Community Health Alliance is an open non-hierarchical participatory advocacy organization comprising a working partnership of more than 100 diverse community members. These include community advocates, cross sector agency stakeholders, health & human service providers/workers, non-profit organizers, county, tribal, and other entities throughout the greater McKinley Community. For more information, Contact Chris Hudson at Chrisbhudson15@gmail.com. Visit the MCHA website at: <https://mckinleyhealthalliance.org/>.

Afternoon Session - Legislative Panel

Moderator: Trip Jennings, Editor, NM In Depth.

Panel: Senator Jerry Ortiz y Pino (D), Albuquerque Representative Roger Montoya (D), North Central NM Representative Luis Terraza (R), South Central NM

What should we expect in the next legislative session for health councils?

1. There are a lot of other competing priorities. It will be important to make legislators aware of how crucial health councils are and how much they can do with a relatively small amount of funding.
2. Health Councils' strength is that they provide diverse services to many communities all around the state

How can health councils best communicate the needs of the community to the legislative body?

1. Leadership matters. Clearly communicating goals, budgets, and implementation plans matter.
2. Health Councils can provide real stories that provide meaning to policy initiatives
3. It is important to engage with relevant committees in the House and Senate
4. Invite local reps to committee hearings, even if they aren't on the health and human services committees
5. Sen. Ortiz y Pino will be the chair of the Senate Health and Human Services Committee this year and wants to see a half/full day where they can hear from health council representatives about their needs

How can health councils compete with paid lobbyists?

1. Legislators would rather hear from the constituents than paid lobbyists.
2. Lobbyists don't hold as much sway as some people think

How has the virtual legislature democratized participation?

1. The virtual only format allowed more voice from constituents and less access to lobbyists
2. There is also value in face-to-face communication that was lost. Hopefully we can find a hybrid model

Talk about the role of Managed Care Organizations (MCOs)

1. Get with those who are negotiating with MCOs. Now is the time to ensure that a portion of their community benefits goes to health councils.

There are only 8 tribal health councils, primarily because health councils aren't funded. How can we increase funding that goes directly to health councils?

1. It takes a lot of capacity to bring on new councils. There is still money available for tribal health councils to be funded between now and 2023. We don't have a guarantee of funding after that.

Talk about Medicaid Reimbursement Rates

1. Reforming Medicaid will be complicated. It is difficult to foresee how this will go
2. It will be valuable to have health council representation in these reforms

How important is it to document the impact of health councils?

1. Very important. Connect your value to other important issues like economic development, education, providing jobs, providing healthcare, mitigating problems, etc.
2. Cite return on investment studies that show a 4:1 return on health council investments.
3. Present an annual report to legislatures that describes the impact of health councils
4. Provide input on committee policy endorsements

How can we work to address the root causes of health issues?

1. Legislation can't solve everything
2. There is a lot of need for on the ground advocacy that health councils provide to these issues

Most important highlights from legislative session

1. Invite your legislator to your health council meeting
2. Update your health council fact sheet with accomplishments
3. Comment on legislation
4. Work with Alliance on a unified approach
5. And you're tired and already doing a lot of other things. But change will not come if we wait for some other person or some other opportunity. Choose one thing to do to move forward.