

RMCHCS program educates community on freezing deaths

Written by By Cody Begaye Sun Correspondent
Friday, 02 November 2018 07:24



City approves adjustments for DETOX, SHELTER programs

Visitors to the downtown area and shoppers at the Safeway and Albertsons plazas lately may have noticed flyers urging folks to call Metro Dispatch or 911 if they see someone in danger of freezing to death.

The flyers are part of an annual freezing prevention program enacted by Rehoboth McKinley Christian Health Care Services.

RMCHCS, along with the Zuni and Navajo Tribal authorities, Gallup Indian Medical Center and numerous county services, have joined forces to create awareness about Navajo Nation and Gallup residents who are in danger of freezing to death.

"The goal of the project is to get the awareness out," RMCHCS Behavioral Health Collaborative Coordinator Juliana Dooley said during an Oct. 29 phone call about a program dubbed One

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Exposure Death is Too Many, a collaborative effort between RMCHCS, NCI and the City of Gallup.

But according to Dooley, in order for the effort to be a success, community wide cooperation is necessary.

“Last week, we went to downtown area [to discuss the program], and everybody was very accommodating,” she said. “They were happy to let us put [fliers] up in the window or by the area.”

Part of this community wide effort to reduce the number of exposure and alcohol-related deaths in the area came from the City of Gallup, which has partnered with Na’Nizhoozhi Center Inc. and SBS Consulting to apply for a Parks and Recreation Development grant, which was discussed at length at the Oct. 9 regular meeting of the Gallup City Council.

The awarded funds total \$1.5 million, and will support social detox, treatment, transportation and case management services to prevent alcohol-related deaths in the community.

Behavioral Health Investment Zone Project Director Debra Martinez spoke for each item at the meeting. She requested approval for the 2019 fiscal year cooperative agreement, which included adjustments to the city budget of \$1.5 million in revenue and expenditures for related PARD services.

Martinez said the PARD grant would include the hire of one full-time employee to assist with meetings and provide general help, and \$1.3 million from the grant was allocated for city Social Detox and Expanded Shelter and Treatment Services.

The contract included with the meeting agenda states the funds would be a reimbursement to NCI — which can accommodate up to 150 people for detoxing, treatment and shelter — in recognition of services delivered.

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At the meeting, Martinez said \$80,000 would be allocated for a professional service agreement with SBS Consulting.

Through this contract, SBS Consulting will be responsible for designing, reviewing and carrying out process and outcome evaluation activities of the City of Gallup for Indian Health Services. They will also assist IHS in preventing alcohol-related deaths by sharing data through social detoxification contractors and the City of Gallup.

The contract will include an evaluation of all new programs and a timeline for finalizing the set of intended outcomes, a timeline for when milestones and outcomes will be achieved, and metrics for measuring quality of work.

Martinez said all data on alcohol-related deaths is checked by Behavioral Health Investment Zone Consulting Services, offered through RMCHCS and NCI, and no projects are signed off until the data is confirmed.

The council affirmed the work done on data checking has been effective in the past.

“[The data] shows what we’re doing as a city to combat this problem,” District 4 Councilor Fran Palochak said.

And indeed, the Gallup Police Department’s open-field patrol is literally out in the trenches, looking for folks in danger of exposure.

GPD Captain Marinda Spencer said the department’s program involves community service aides who venture into areas like open fields and cramped roads — places difficult to access with a regular vehicle — to look for people who may be stranded or unconscious.

“They go out on foot or in off-road vehicles, and seek out victims of exposure or the elements in high-risk locations [like large open fields],” Spencer said in an Oct. 31 phone call.

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According to an Oct. 26 press release for RMCHCS, eight residents died from hypothermia in 2015, and four deaths were reported in 2017 and 2018.

At the Oct. 9 regular city meeting on the matter, Mayor Jackie McKinney told the room the topic of alcohol-related deaths comes before the council often. He said the city would continue to do what it takes to tackle the issue.

“We’re not going to let [the efforts] go away,” he said.

Call Metro Dispatch at (505) 722-2231, or 911 in an emergency, to report someone in danger of freezing to death.

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