

Using tablets to improve communication during social isolation

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NEW MEXICO- In an effort to ensure people living in nursing facilities remain connected with their loved ones, New Mexico's Aging and Long-Term Services Department has purchased and distributed 350 tablets across the state to licensed facilities.

On March 14, the New Mexico Department of Health took steps to protect nursing home residents by limiting visitation to the facilities and providing guidelines for visitors. In conjunction with this announcement, the ALTSD's Ombudsman Program started accepting requests for the tablets from facilities, residents and family members. The ALTSD worked with a wireless company to purchase the tablets and leveraged video conferencing and chat solutions to facilitate enhanced communications between residents and their loved ones during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"We are living in unprecedented times. Not only is it critical that we support our neighbors through these challenging days and weeks, but also that we make sure we are fostering relationships and staying connected. Using virtual communication like video chats is a simple step we can take to boost our spirits, maintain safe interactions, and engage with those we love," ALTSD Cabinet Secretary Katrina Hotrum-Lopez said. "We are all in this together and must support one another, which is particularly true for those who may feel disconnected. I

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encourage everyone to check in with their elderly friends and family members to ensure they are receiving the care they require as well as helping them overcome loneliness that can be the natural result of limited person-to-person interactions.”

Many family members and residents have expressed their appreciation for the ability to stay connected during this pandemic. In one facility, staff members were providing their own personal phones to residents so they could contact family. Recognizing how significant those regular interactions are for the wellbeing and quality of life of the elderly residents, caretakers are grateful to offer this option in order to allow families to maintain these critical communications.

In addition to the 350 tablets purchased by ALTSD, the New Mexico Health Care Association purchased 140 more tablets for distribution to nursing home facilities.

The tablets can also be used for monitoring purposes, helping to ensure the safety and wellbeing of residents.

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