

RMCHCS granted \$390k to create psychiatric program for Native Americans

Written by By William Madaras For the Sun
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GALLUP - Rehoboth McKinley Christian Health Care Services has received a \$390,165.00 grant for a three-year initiative to develop a Psychiatric Care Program to serve Native Americans.

The funding is part of a million dollar grant provided by the New Mexico Human Services Department to develop its first Graduate Medical Education Program. The funds will enable the hospital to add three physicians yearly to fill the GME's 12 new residency positions in New Mexico that will focus on addressing the region's Native American behavioral health needs.

The program will require two years of psychiatric training in a major metropolitan area with inpatient psychiatric, neurology, geriatric psychiatry, and extended adolescent opportunities. The final two years would take place at RMCH, with a focus on Native American mental health, substance abuse treatment, and the potential for research related to Native American behavioral health.

Its focus will be on recruiting medical students interested in practicing psychiatry in rural areas and with a predominantly Native American population. The curriculum will address regional issues such as social determinants of mental health, trauma informed care, as well as some of the specific behavioral and mental health needs of the population, including responding to psychiatric disorders, depression, alcohol and substance use disorders, and trauma related to violence and sexual assault.

"When a pandemic hits like COVID-19, the immediate response is the physical well-being of the patient. However, the psychological toll a pandemic can take must also be treated," RMCHCS CEO David Conejo said. "When you add the fact that Gallup and McKinley County have a high level of substance abuse cases, we believe a psychiatric care program is very much in need."

OTHER NEW MEXICO HOSPITALS SHARE GRANT

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The Burrell College of Osteopathic Medicine in Las Cruces was also funded for the expansion of the Southern New Mexico Family Medicine program to add four residents per year for a total of 12 new residency positions. Memorial Medical Center of Las Cruces also received funds to create a new general psychiatry program that will add three residents per year for a total of 12 new residency positions.

The legislation creating the program was sponsored by Doreen Gallegos, D - Las Cruces, and Nathan Small, D - Las Cruces, to ensure funding was available to address local needs.

“It’s gratifying that our work will now directly benefit medical students who will now work directly with residents of McKinley County,” Gallegos said.

“There has never been a more important time to add family medicine and general psychiatry residents,” Small said.

LOCAL, STATEWIDE SHORTAGE

Northwest New Mexico has a marked shortage of psychiatric providers, currently with only one psychiatrist and limited telemedicine capacity serving the Gallup-McKinley County community. New Mexico’s Native American populations suffer high rates of depression, suicide, substance abuse, and other mental health issues, owing, in part, to difficult social conditions and extensive intergenerational trauma.

New Mexico currently has a shortage of physicians in 32 of its 33 counties.

“Behavioral healthcare is a vital need for all residents statewide,” New Mexico Rural Hospital Network CEO Stephen Stoddard said. The goal of New Mexico’s healthcare community is to bridge the gap in rural health and ensure adequate and appropriate care is available to all New

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Mexicans regardless of their address.”

Research shows 50-75 percent of medical residents stay within 100 miles of their residency program; and investments in primary care yield significant returns for physicians-in-training, local economies, and communities.

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