



## THE NAVAJO NATION

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT & VICE PRESIDENT

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

APRIL 1, 2008

CONTACT: GEORGE HARDEEN  
COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR  
OFFICE – 928-871-7917  
CELL – 928-309-8532  
pressoffice@opvp.org

# Navajo Vice President Ben Shelly acknowledged for support of New Mexico urban Native American health legislation

**ALBUQUERQUE, N.M.** – Grassroots Native American health advocates acknowledged the support given by Navajo Nation Vice President Ben Shelly for the creation of a New Mexico commission charged with improving the health of urban Native people.

The Vice President received the acknowledgement here Friday at a New Mexico American Indian Health Advisory Committee meeting for his support of legislation to create the commission.

During this year's New Mexico legislative session, Off-Reservation Native American Health legislation, sponsored by Representative Mimi Stewart, passed both legislative houses and was signed by Governor Bill Richardson.

With the bill's passage, the Bernalillo County Commission will be able to create what's called the Bernalillo County Off-Reservation Native American Health Commission. The legislation also calls for the appointment of nine urban Native American health experts and advocates to the commission.

"States such as New Mexico should continue to assist its citizens with their health care needs, especially those who don't have health insurance," Vice President Shelly said. "Many Navajos living in New Mexico are voting citizens and are residents of New Mexico. We are here to work with and support the State of New Mexico to better health conditions for the Navajo people living on and off the Navajo Nation."

Within two years, the urban Native American health commission will create an initial health care plan with

several goals. These include determining the number of Native Americans residing in Bernalillo County.

First Nations Community Health Source, a federally-qualified health center serving urban Native Americans, estimates that number at 45,000-to-51,000 Native American and Alaska Native people residing in Albuquerque.

"With this commission, we will get a solid estimate of how many Native Americans live in Bernalillo County," said Sonny Weahkee, director of the Sage Council.

Roxane Spruce-Bly, Bernalillo County Commission Off-Reservation Health workgroup coordinator, said the health commission will also inventory all non-emergency health care resources available for urban Native Americans, and create a cross-jurisdictional budget analysis compiled from the most current annual figures reported by state and county facilities demonstrating the amount of health care funding for off-reservation Native Americans.

She said it will also provide recommendations to eliminate duplication of health services.

"We need to take care of each other and we need to take care of our people," said Norman Ration, executive director of the National Indian Youth Council. "A lot of people were falling into the cracks. Even though we had struggles, we are moving forward."

For more information, please contact Sherrick Roanhorse in the Office of the Vice President at 928-871-7001.

###