



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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## **Health, Education, and Human Services Committee receives update from the Navajo Nation Department of Behavioral Health Services**

WINDOW ROCK – The Health, Education, and Human Services Committee received an update from the Navajo Nation Department of Behavioral Health Services on Wednesday, regarding a Condition of Authority issued by the HEHSC. The action requires the completion of a comprehensive plan to address adolescent treatment centers throughout the Navajo Nation.

HEHSC chair Council Delegate Jonathan Hale (Oak Springs, St. Michaels) emphasized the need for increased adolescent treatment to prevent the continuation of behavioral problems such as alcohol abuse and drug addiction.

“Often, our youth learn such behavior from their parents and it continues when they become parents, so it’s important to address the problem when they are still young,” Delegate Hale said.

Theresa Galvan with the Navajo Division of Health said she, along with clinical directors, had identified a list of priorities and future plans for the DBHS.

“The need for licensure and certified staff is among the top priorities,” said Galvan. “It is important to have adequate staff that is able to be effective in treating our clientele.”

DBHS has recently dedicated treatment centers in Newlands and Tuba City, while development is underway for centers in K’ai’Bii’To, Crownpoint, and Ojo Encino, Galvan said.

A crisis response plan is also being developed. The plan will include the establishment of a crisis phone number in response to an increased number of suicides during spring break and graduation season in recent years, according to Galvan.

Council Delegate Walter Phelps (Cameron, Coalmine Canyon, Leupp, Tolani Lake, Tsidi To ii) applauded the efforts to establish a crisis phone number, and suggested for HEHSC to possibly incorporate the initiative in a legislation being developed to enhance the 911 emergency system on the Navajo Nation.

Council Delegate Joshua Lavar Butler (Tó Nanees Dizi) commended the DBHS for moving forward with initiatives, despite uncertainty surrounding sequester budget cuts, while also addressing the need to mobilize their services across the Nation, including areas surrounding the new Twin Arrows Navajo Casino.

“I’m an advocate for casinos, but we also have to acknowledge the other side of it,” said Delegate Butler. “We will see an increase in neglect, addiction, violence, and other social ills, and we need to address those issues.”

In response to Delegate Butler’s statement, Galvan explained that the DBHS currently has two mobile units they plan to deploy so as to establish a stable presence in more communities.

Council Delegate Dwight Witherspoon (Black Mesa, Forest Lake, Hardrock, Pinon, Whippoorwill) recommended that the DBHS establish a presence within schools in an effort to combat social and behavioral issues affecting students.

Delegate Witherspoon who represents the community of Pinon, explained that in one year, nearly 100 students from Pinon Unified School were disciplined for drug use, mainly marijuana.

“We need to get into the schools and make changes before these problems progress,” Delegate Witherspoon said.

Near the conclusion of the discussion, HEHSC members discussed the possibility of collaborating with the Law and Order Committee, Navajo Nation Department of Public Safety, Navajo Division of Health, and other entities to develop a 5-year plan to address and combat social issues.

HEHSC members also acknowledged the need to update the Navajo Nation’s behavioral health code and policies to comply with the Indian Healthcare Improvement Act.

HEHSC members accepted the report from the Navajo Nation Department of Behavioral Health Services with a 4-0 vote.

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