



## THE NAVAJO NATION

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT & VICE PRESIDENT

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# Navajo President Joe Shirley, Jr., signs state-tribal procedure that ensures consultation on health issues with New Mexico

**ALBUQUERQUE, N.M.** – Navajo Nation President Joe Shirley, Jr., joined New Mexico Secretary of Indian Affairs Benny Shendo, Jr., four cabinet secretaries, and the leaders of several New Mexico pueblos and tribes last week to sign a procedure to ensure tribal consultation in health care and human services matters.

The protocol grew out of an executive order by New Mexico Gov. Bill Richardson that directed state agencies and departments to develop plans to consult with tribes. Work began a year-and-a-half ago at the first New Mexico Health & Human Services' Tribal Consultation meeting in Albuquerque.

“Gov. Richardson mandated his cabinet secretaries and his agencies to develop tribal consultation, or a process in which to communicate with Indian tribes within the State of New Mexico,” said Roselyn Begay, director of the Navajo Division of Health Office of Planning, Research & Evaluation. “That authorized the secretaries to move forward with the governor’s policy.”

Five New Mexico state departments worked together to develop a system to work with 22 of the tribes and pueblos in New Mexico.

At the New Mexico Health and Human Services' State-Tribal Summit here Thursday, President Shirley expressed his appreciation to Gov. Richardson for his initiative to include Native people at the table when issues affecting them are discussed and decisions are being made.

“Because we’re all different, oftentimes we need instruments of peace, like what we’re trying to put in place here, which are necessary to have a relationship,” he said. “And I appreciate the honorable governor of the great State of New Mexico, the



*Navajo President Joe Shirley, Jr., is joined by Children, Youth & Families Dept. Secretary Dorian Dodson, Aging and Long-Term Services Secretary Debbie Armstrong, Human Services Secretary Pamela Hyde, Indian Affairs Secretary Shendo, Michelle Welby, Gov. Richardson’s Health Policy advisor, and Dr. Sam Howarth, director of Office of Policy and Multicultural Health representing the New Mexico Dept. of Health.*

Honorable Bill Richardson, a son and brother to Native people, for treating us with respect, dignity and honor. And he has done that ever since he has been the governor of this great state.”

President Shirley said the contributions of Native people to the freedom in the United States and the world has often been overlooked, but that “Native people have gone a long way to make a contribution to the country and freedom of man.”

“As sovereigns, as governments, and as peoples, we all need to get along,” the President said. “The challenges we face daily are all beyond us. By ourselves we are very limited. But together we have a chance to make our way in the world.”

Anslem Roanhorse, director of the Navajo Division of Health, said the basis of the state-tribal agreement is to include tribes as partners in decision-making.

"The foundation is that it really respects the tribal sovereignty, the differences among the Indian tribes throughout the state of New Mexico, so it's a good way to set up the protocol for that on-going dialogue to occur," he said. "Anytime you deal with health care issues, human service issues, there's a process now put in place where we would set up a team that would comprise of representatives and then we would have a discussion and work out some options and then come to some agreements," he said.

Since the first state-tribal consultation meeting, the Navajo Nation has seen several changes adopted by the state, he said. Among them is the change in the Medicaid Eligibility Recertification Policy from a six-month re-certification to a 12-month re-certification.

Since then, Medicaid enrollment of Native Americans in the McKinley and San Juan counties, and revenues in facilities operated by the Navajo Area Indian Health Service has increased, he said. Some 34,000, or 45 percent of the 75,550 Native Americans enrolled in the New Mexico Medicaid Program, are Navajos, he said.

Other changes include:

- Establishing three Income Support Division offices in the Navajo Area IHS facilities in Gallup, Shiprock and Crownpoint, and hiring three ISD workers to be available on-site for face-to-face meetings with Navajo patients who assist with processing applications and determining eligibility for Medicaid and Food Stamp programs.
- Demonstrated willingness by the New Mexico Behavioral Health Transformation to assist the Navajo Nation increase behavioral health system capacity and sustainability efforts, and
- Assistance from the Children, Youth and Families Department, the Human Services Department, and "ValueOptions New Mexico" to help the Navajo Nation behavioral health program begin the process to become a Medicaid provider.

Mr. Roanhorse said the Navajo Nation is working to develop a Navajo Division of Aging Services to strengthen, improve and expand services to Navajo elders. These include providing adequate nutrition, transportation, health care, social services, housing, disability, and elder protection and rights.

Currently, he said, there are about 17,600 Navajo elders who are 60 years old and older, and 1,235 who reside in nursing or group homes.

The Navajo Nation appreciates the efforts of the New Mexico Human Services Department and the Children, Youth and Families Department for inviting tribal staff to attend state-wide stakeholder meetings, he said.

Mr. Roanhorse said he was grateful the 2007 New Mexico State Legislature passed SB 0827, a severance tax bond to include a \$3 million appropriation for infrastructure improvements at Native American behavioral health services facilities statewide. He said this would not have been achieved without the overwhelming tribal leaders' support and advocacy.

He said the Navajo Nation is working to convert the former Shiprock IHS facility into a 72-bed Navajo Nation Regional Adult Residential Treatment Center. The Navajo Nation has secured 88 percent of the needed money for the renovation but still needs \$2 million to complete the construction, he said.

The facility will treat Navajos who are afflicted with alcohol and substance abuse and co-occurring disorders, and will offer integrated cultural teaching and traditional healing components in the overall treatment process, he said.

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