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FOURTH EMERGENCY ACCOMMODATION OPENS AS PART OF NONPROFIT C.O.P.E., HOSPITALS, AND HOTELS' INNOVATIVE PARTNERSHIP TO FIGHT COVID-19

GALLUP, NEW MEXICO – With the Gallup area’s unsheltered population at extremely high risk of COVID-19, the non-profit Community Outreach & Patient Empowerment (COPE) has partnered with local hospitals Gallup Indian Medical Center (GIMC) and Rehoboth McKinley Christian Health Care Services (RMCHCS) as well as four local hotels and motels to establish a network of care and emergency housing designed for quarantine and social distancing. This joint effort has been increasing capacity to serve the community since late March and can now accommodate up to 175 individuals; it is considered a critical strategy to slow the rapid spread of COVID-19 in McKinley County (which is currently experiencing the fastest growth in New Mexico) and on the neighboring Navajo Nation.

The El Rancho Hotel was the first to receive community members and has since been joined by Motel 6, Howard Johnson, and on Friday evening, Days Inn. Occupancy has been rising steadily, with over 115 individuals sheltered on Friday evening. These establishments provide shelter and meals funded by the New Mexico Department of Public Health and the Navajo Nation, 24-7 transportation is provided by funds pooled by generous local donations, while COPE staff help coordinate care and necessities among the patients, hotel staff and medical staff at the two local hospitals. This collaborative model was created to address how easily coronavirus could spread, and to bolster robust support for Gallup’s unsheltered individuals and for any families that might have difficulty social distancing in multi-generational homes; the heavy burden of chronic health conditions in the region is also a top concern. Representatives from several organizations in Gallup came together starting in March to discuss potential solutions, logistics and identify a funding model to make this resource possible.

“It’s been a very large and unique collaborative effort” said Hannah Sehn, Director of Programs at COPE, “We’re really leveraging different resources across health facilities, programs, and within the city, whether it’s the ambulance service or other emergency services. Being able to provide that support has been really important at every step, from getting referrals to thinking about the right transportation and how to train each person that helps along the way. A lot of thought that has gone into it.”

As COVID-19 continues to disproportionately impact the most vulnerable individuals in the Gallup area, the initiative has not only created a safety net but is also strengthening local capacity. “It has catalyzed larger conversations around the long-term systems and supports that need to be in place and ways to build on this. We want to leverage the partnerships that we’ve formed during this time to think about these things in innovative and sustainable ways,” explained Sehn. Just this week, the recovery of some of the first individuals to be sheltered at El Rancho has lifted the spirits of participants and exemplifies outcomes the Gallup community hopes to see more of.



ABOUT: [Community Outreach and Patient Empowerment](#) (COPE) is a Gallup-based 501c3 founded in 2009 with the belief that the power to overturn long-standing historical health inequalities lies inherently in Native communities themselves. For more information, contact: aditi@copeprogram.org