



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

September 17, 2015

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Health, Education, and Human Services Committee receives report regarding suicide prevention efforts from Utah Navajo Health System

WINDOW ROCK – On Wednesday, the Health, Education, and Human Services Committee received a report from the Utah Navajo Health System regarding a proposed suicide prevention initiative, in which they plan to collaborate not only with the Utah Navajo area, but the entire Navajo Nation through data collecting and information sharing.

In response to the several suicides that occurred recently on the Navajo Nation, the UNHS Board of Directors declared a state of emergency on Sept. 16, stating that a portion of their resources will now be committed to programs, services, staffing, and financial means to aid in suicide prevention.

“It is with sadness that the UNHS Board of Directors establishes a state of emergency because of recent suicides in our communities,” said UNHS board director Robert Whitehorse. “We mourn with the community as it has experienced the shock and deep sorrow in losing individuals that were so loved. Indeed the emotional toll on everyone has been significant.”

Whitehorse said that they have garnered support from Navajo communities in Utah, as well as other areas on the Navajo Nation to begin partnerships with other agencies to increase awareness, provide educational tools, de-stigmatize the illness and treatments, network with health care and mental health professionals, and increase suicide prevention efforts at primary and secondary schools.

HEHSC member Council Delegate Nelson S. BeGaye (Lukachukai, Rock Point, Round Rock, Tsaile/Wheatfields, Tsé Ch’ izhi) suggested that a suicide prevention event be held each year to reach out to youth and adults all over the Navajo Nation, which could mirror the Life Preservation Summit that is held annually in the Tsaile/Wheatfield area.

“It’s sad that we are a reactive nation. We wait until something happens and then we try to correct it. We don’t do this on a daily basis. We are hoping this does not die down and that it continues to be a part of our schedule every year,” said Delegate BeGaye. “Suicide and death is hard to talk about as Navajos, but we need to begin that conversation and run with it.”

Navajo Nation Vice President Jonathan Nez said the Office of the President and Vice President has been working with the Navajo Department of Emergency Management and the Navajo Division of

Health to address the recent suicides, and commended UNHS for being proactive in addressing the issue.

EHSC chair Council Delegate Jonathan Hale (Oak Springs, St. Michaels) said a letter of support has been submitted to the OPVP to declare a state of emergency so that emergency funding can be allocated to UNHS to aid in suicide prevention efforts across the Navajo Nation, and his office would begin the declaration process.

EHSC members voted 4-0 to accept the report.

OPVP indicated that the next interdisciplinary team meeting on suicide response and post intervention will take place on Sept. 22 at the Division of Diné Education Center in Window Rock.

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