



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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Health, Education, and Human Services Committee receives annual report from Utah Navajo Health System, Inc.

MONTEZUMA CREEK, Utah – The Health, Education, and Human Services Committee received an annual report from the Utah Navajo Health System, Inc., which highlighted newly opened clinics, challenges, and addressed concerns from Navajo leadership. UNHS provides health care services to Utah Navajo communities and surrounding areas.

According to the report provided by the UNHS administration and Board of Directors, UNHS recently opened a new clinic in Montezuma Creek in June, and are currently planning to construct a new health care facility in Blanding. UNHS has clinics in the communities of Navajo Mountain, Mexican Water, Oljato, Red Mesa, Aneth, Teec Nos Pos, and a shared clinic with Blue Mountain Diné in Blanding.

In addition to the annual report, the committee had the opportunity to tour the newly constructed Montezuma Creek Health Care Center, which holds 36 exam rooms, six behavioral health counseling rooms, an advanced x-ray system, 10 dental operatories, multiple conference rooms, and implemented patient service representatives to greet and direct patients to the services they are seeking.

HEHSC member Council Delegate Nathaniel Brown (Chilchinbeto, Dennehotso, Kayenta) commended UNHS for the improvement in their infrastructure and health care services to Navajo communities, however expressed concerns with the high turnover of medical professionals at Navajo clinics and hospitals.

“We need to plant the seed for Navajo youth to shadow doctors, nurses, and administration— help them become motivated to explore health careers so they can come home and be employed by UNHS. Our focus should be on high school students in San Juan County—we want them to immerse themselves here in this environment. We want this pipeline to where our Navajo children are shadowing employees here [at UNHS] to grow our own health care providers,” said Delegate Brown.

Delegate Brown encouraged the UNHS Board of Directors to reach out to local high schools and develop an internship program to allow students to work with doctors, nurses, and other service

providers. He added that collaborating with the local schools promotes unity and a cohesive community environment.

The report stated challenges such the increase in staffing and services has created a shortage in space and resources, providing competitive benefits for employees, lack of resources to keep up with continual training for medical professionals and staff, congressional efforts to repeal and replace the Affordable Care Act, and impacts of the budget cuts made to the Medicaid program.

HEHSC member Council Delegate Steven Begay (Coyote Canyon, Mexican Springs, Naschitti, Tohatchi, Bahastl'a'a') said an additional challenge that many health care facilities are facing is the lack of Navajo language interpreters that would aid Navajo-speaking patients to understand the treatment they are receiving and to answer any questions they may have.

“Interpreter positions are crucial in making a change for Navajo people and how they are comprehending their health care. I am eager to see which health facility will take the lead on that. There is little interpretation of medical terms in the Navajo language, such as explaining a mammogram and its process. The care communicated to the patient needs to exist so they understand what they need to do,” said Delegate Begay.

Delegate Begay encouraged 638-Contract health care facilities to lead the way in employing highly trained Navajo interpreters to foster a more comfortable environment for Navajo-speaking individuals, and to instill confidence in patients to ask questions about their care, understand their care options, medications, and other health care services.

Additionally, the UNHS annual report states that their clinics now operate behavioral health services that provide victim advocacy for domestic and sexual violence victims. The services provided include victim advocates, emergency shelter services, support, transportation, relocation, prevention program, referrals, training and education, and crisis intervention and safety planning.

The program was awarded a grant through the Victims of Crime Act, which provides victims access to medical care, dental care, counseling, funeral and burial services, aid to address loss of wages, aid for loss of support to a dependent, child care, and traditional ceremonial services. A police report or application for the program is no longer needed and victims have access to services immediately, states the report.

HEHSC members voted 3-0 to accept the annual report.

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