



Navajo Nation Indian Managed Care Entity discussions await OPVP and NM Governor involvement

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: January 11, 2021

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. — Thursday morning, members of the 24th Navajo Nation Council met telephonically with New Mexico state officials to discuss the Navajo Nation's efforts to establish an Indian Managed Care Entity (IMCE). The effort is a result of the Council's push to establish a Navajo managed care organization to facilitate Medicaid services for its citizens.

Health, Education, and Human Services Committee (HEHSC) Chair Daniel Tso (Littlewater, Pueblo Pintado, Torreon, Whitehorse Lake, Baca/Prewitt, Casamero Lake, Ojo Encino, Counselor), Vice Chair Carl R. Slater (Round Rock, Rock Point, Tsé'ch'izí, Lukachugai, Tsaile-Wheatfields) and State Task Force Chair Mark Freeland (Becenti, Lake Valley, Náhodishgish, Standing Rock, Whiterock, Huerfano, Nageezi, Crownpoint) spoke in support of the IMCE, which would provide healthcare services to Navajo people living in the New Mexico portion of the Navajo Nation through active enrollment under a healthcare plan run by the Navajo Nation-owned Naat'áanii Development Corporation (NDC).

"The Navajo Nation established the Naat'áanii Development Corporation to promote a better quality of life for the Navajo People. Today, the Council continues to push for every possible resource to address the coronavirus pandemic. Soon, we will also be actively discussing the recovery of our People, physically, mentally and spiritually. The Indian Managed Care Entity, when Gov. Grisham and President Nez allow the Nation to proceed, will provide a strong foundation for the unique needs of our families and communities to be met under a Navajo Nation-controlled managed care organization," said Delegate Tso.

The opportunity for tribes to establish IMCEs was established by the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act and further reauthorized by the Affordable Care Act. The Navajo Nation Council provided NDC the necessary authorities to engage with state and federal agencies to accomplish the full implementation of the IMCE, which would be the first in the United States.

However, Governor Grisham, with the support of President Nez, has delayed implementation of the IMCE and is threatening to end the project. Governor Grisham, at the request of the president's office, is insisting the Navajo Nation waive its sovereign immunity in order for implementation to begin.

"The Navajo Nation Department of Justice agrees the Navajo Nation does not need to waive its sovereign immunity to stand up the IMCE. There shouldn't be any reason to further interfere with internal Navajo Nation matters and the Nation's sovereignty," said Speaker Seth Damon (Bááhaalj, Chichiltah, Manuelito, Red Rock, Rock Springs, Tséyatoh).

In a Jan. 7 letter to New Mexico Health Services Department Secretary David Scrase, the Navajo Nation Department of Justice, which is overseen by the Navajo Nation President, stated the Navajo Nation does not need to be a signatory to the IMCE Contract.

"Everyone wants to move forward in fully implementing this IMCE. It's been almost a decade since discussions began, in earnest, for the Navajo Nation to make every healthcare resource available to the Navajo People through this effort. We ask President Nez and Governor Grisham to move forward on this opportunity for the benefit of our Navajo people in New Mexico," said Delegate Freeland.

Resolution No. CMA-14-20, approved by the Council in March 2020, was vetoed by President Nez, who expressed support for the IMCE with preference for “active enrollment” into the Medicaid plan.

The Council resolution requested the state to passively enroll members into the plan as part of the implementation of the IMCE. In a spirit of compromise, NDC agreed to move forward with active enrollment, despite a veto override that made permanent the Nation’s position that the state should pursue passive enrollment.

“The Navajo Nation, including President Nez in public statements but not private actions, supports standing up the IMCE. For most Navajo people in New Mexico, this means having a new option for healthcare that will better serve our communities. The vision Navajo leadership sees for a better healthcare system starts with the IMCE, and as Navajo leaders, we need to keep pushing for that at all levels of government. With this historic opportunity, the Navajo People will reap the benefits of managed care, instead of political donors and health care companies located off the reservation. We could get started on this, as Nation, tomorrow, and that is what we ask the President Nez and Governor Grisham to support,” said Delegate Slater.

Thursday’s teleconference was organized by state officials to discuss the language of the agreement that authorizes the full implementation of the IMCE. However, no representative from the Office of the President and Vice President was available at the discussion.

NDC began under former President Russell Begaye and then-Vice President Jonathan Nez as an alternative revenue source, especially as the shutdown planning of the Navajo Generating Station and the Kayenta Peabody Mine began.

###

MEDIA CONTACTS: communications@navajo-nsn.gov, (928) 287-2085
Byron C. Shorty, INT Communications Director
Timothy E. Benally, Public Information Officer