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Human Services Department Honors Native Americans During Native American Heritage Month

Initiatives to Assist More Native American Children Receive Services Continues

Santa Fe, NM – “On behalf of the thousands of Native Americans we serve each month, both on and off reservations, the Human Services Department welcomed November as Native American Heritage Month,” said Pamela Hyde, department Secretary. The department helps mostly low-income families obtain child support, food, financial assistance, home heating and health coverage from 54 field offices; including field offices located in Native American communities statewide.

“Our new partnership with the Indian Health Service has helped to enroll hundreds more Native Americans who qualify for our programs such as Medicaid, but have not applied simply because of time and distance,” said Hyde. For the past year, the department has had full-time income support staff located at the Indian Health Service (IHS) hospitals in Shiprock, Crownpoint and Gallup. “Funding to expand the Native American outreach project has allowed the department to add staff to Albuquerque, Santa Fe, Acoma-Canoncito-Laguna and Mescalero IHS hospitals which began in September.” Native Americans have local access to these offices and are assisted with Medicaid and food stamp applications.

“Perhaps, 2007 has been our most successful year in tribal-state collaborations,” said Hyde. “Legislation, sponsored by State Representative Ray Begaye, was signed by Governor Bill Richardson into law this year that increases Native Americans’ access to behavioral health services by allowing more certified alcohol and substance treatment providers to be grandfathered as licensed providers, which will allow IHS or tribal 638 providers to be reimbursed through Medicaid.”

Also in June, 2007, respecting the sovereign status of the 22 pueblos and tribes in New Mexico, final procedures were approved to ensure tribal consultation in health care and human services matters. This protocol, which is being signed by all tribal leaders and the health and human services department secretaries, grew out of an executive order by Governor Richardson that directed state agencies and departments to develop plans to consult with tribes. The protocol was developed by a state-tribal work group, which included representatives from the All Indian Pueblo Council, the Navajo Nation, Zia and Zuni Pueblos

“Our work with Native American stakeholders in crafting Governor Bill Richardson’s *Health SOLUTIONS New Mexico* plan has been important in helping to develop the plan to bring universal health coverage to New Mexico,” said Hyde. Native American uninsured stands at 28 percent compared to 11

percent of non-Hispanic whites in the state. “HSD hopes to get more direct input from Tribal leaders for *HealthSOLUTIONS New Mexico* on November 26 at a state-tribal leadership meeting.

The protocol has also provided guidance to the department in conducting Tribal Consultation and seeking Native American input for the Coordinated Long Term Service program, a joint initiative with the Aging and Long Term Services Department that will cover primary, acute and long-term care services for over 38,000 elderly and disabled Medicaid recipients in July 2008. The department estimates that 6,000 of these individuals are Native American.

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