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Governor

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## **Immediate Release**

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### **Secretary of Health participates in White House webinar on COVID-19 vaccine communication** *Highlights New Mexico's partnerships with community- and faith-based organizations*

Santa Fe--New Mexico Department of Health (NMDOH) Secretary Dr. Tracie Collins spoke this afternoon at a White House webinar on collaboration between New Mexico state agencies and community- and faith-based organizations for effective COVID-19 vaccine communication.

The event, titled "All In: Partnering with Community and Faith Organizations in COVID-19 Vaccination Efforts" - included commentary from the following participants.

Dr. Tracie Collins – Secretary, New Mexico Department of Health  
Dr. Nirav Shah – Director, Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention & President, Association of State and Territorial Health Officials  
Ms. Julie Pryde – Administrator, Champaign/Urbana Public Health District  
Dr. Oscar Alleyne – Chief of Programs and Services, National Association of County and City Health Officials

Below are the Secretary's prepared remarks.

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Thank you for the welcome - and thank you to Dr. Webb and Ms. Okolo for organizing today's event.

I appreciate the focus of this session, especially as we transition into a new phase of the vaccination campaign. As you know, the first several months of this effort were focused on delivering scarce vaccine doses to an eager population. At this point, nearly 60% of age-eligible New Mexicans have received at least a first shot, and nearly 40% are fully vaccinated. Now, we are working to reach, communicate with, and encourage those who haven't yet been vaccinated.

Let me say it plainly: community-based organizations and faith-based organizations are indispensable to this work. Often, they are the most knowledgeable, credible, and trusted people in their community - and when community members have vaccine concerns, CBOs and FBOs are often best-positioned to foster an atmosphere of respect, non-judgment, and open-ended listening.

The Department of Health partners with CBOs and FBOs in a variety of ways - including hosting culturally and linguistically appropriate virtual town halls. Thus far, we have held events with the Black and African-American communities, the mono-lingual Spanish-speaking Latinx community, Spanish-speaking health care providers in the border region, the Asian-American and Pacific Islander community, the LGBTQ community, and the disability community, with rurally-focused and faith-based events in the works.

Each of these events provides community members a chance to ask questions, voice concerns, and hear from scientific experts about what we know, what we don't know, and what we're still learning about COVID-19 and the vaccines.

These events have proven especially valuable at building vaccine confidence. In fact, we regularly see a spike in vaccine registrations following these town halls - which is important to our ongoing health equity efforts.

Health equity also means meeting people where they live, work and play. Community health workers - who are also trusted messengers - meet with people in their own communities to support registration and increase vaccine confidence.

In the same vein, I'd also like to highlight our Trusted Voices campaign - a series of YouTube videos featuring more than fifty (and counting) New Mexicans from every walk of life, ethnic and racial background, and professional affiliation.

These videos - available in multiple languages - allow New Mexicans to address one another about their experiences with the vaccine: to speak their minds and share from the heart. The videos have received thousands of views - and more volunteers each week. And crucially, they are created and promoted through partnerships with CBOs and FBOs. It isn't just state government broadcasting into the ether - it's churches, synagogues, universities, LGBTQ resource centers, food banks, community centers, and Native health organizations communicating directly with their members and their local communities.

I've mentioned language several times, but allow me to linger there a moment longer. Reaching people - especially in a diverse state like New Mexico - doesn't mean just publishing an English-language press release and hoping for the best. It means speaking to people in their languages - and at the appropriate level of health literacy.

Our Office of Health Equity (OHE) translates all Covid-related material into Spanish, Vietnamese, Dine/Navajo and Arabic to reach border, frontier, colonias, immigrant, refugee and asylum-seeking community members, and has worked hard to calibrate health literacy levels appropriately across all our communication materials. And again, CBOs and FBOs are essential in helping us refine these materials - and delivering them to New Mexicans.

Of course, all of this is just a brief summary, and I am happy to delve into further detail if that would be useful. Again, I thank you for the invitation, and I look forward to hearing from the other guests.

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**NMDOH**

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The Department of Health works to promote health and wellness, improve health outcomes, and deliver services to all New Mexicans. As New Mexico's largest state agency, DOH offers public health services in all 33 counties and collaborates with 23 Native American tribes, Pueblos and nations.