



Office of the Governor

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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U.S. Surgeon General, Gov. Lujan Grisham meet with health care providers

SANTA FE – U.S. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy and Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham met with health care heroes from across New Mexico and celebrated the state’s success in suppressing COVID-19 on Tuesday as Dr. Murthy, at the governor’s invitation, made his first official trip since his reappointment earlier this year.

At a ceremony at the New Mexico History Museum, Dr. Murthy spoke at great length and movingly about the tireless efforts of New Mexico health care leaders and workers over the course of the pandemic, crediting and thanking New Mexico providers and nurses and more for saving countless lives and congratulating the governor as well as other officials for their efforts to protect the state, region and country.

Prior to that, the governor and Dr. Murthy met with and [spoke with a group of New Mexico youth leaders](#) about their pandemic experience, their resilience and youth vaccine outreach.

At the museum, Gov. Lujan Grisham honored eight health care workers with an individual gubernatorial proclamation, declaring a celebratory day in honor of each of them. The honorees are listed below.

“These doctors and nurses and leaders didn’t need a public health order last year to step up and do what was right, to go above and beyond to protect New Mexicans,” said **Gov. Lujan Grisham**. “They didn’t need an invitation to be partners with us, the state, in doing everything we could to stem the tide of the virus and keep families and communities whole. They just did it – they were ready to work; they never said no; they kept going even when the road was dark and the personal sacrifices and anxiety intensified. Everyone worked through those emotions every single day. They keep doing the work. There are dedicated professionals just like them, in every corner of our state, making it happen every single day. And that’s all I need to know as a governor. It’s deeply humbling to lead a state with leaders like this. It was an honor for me to honor them. I couldn’t be prouder of them and of our state.”

The governor and surgeon general were scheduled to take part in a roundtable with health care providers, as well, on Tuesday evening.

The New Mexico health care heroes honored by the governor Tuesday were:

Dr. Shannon Allen, who practices at Nor-Lea Hospital District in Lovington, New Mexico. In her career in health care, she has worked as a nurse, certified registered nurse anesthetist and doctor of nurse anesthesia practice in Lea County for over 33 years. During the pandemic, Dr. Allen dedicated herself to researching best practices and finding real life solutions to the multitude of challenges that came with being a health care provider in a rural community during an unprecedented pandemic, as well as caring for critically ill patients; and she exhibited exemplary leadership in coordinating the donations of personal protection equipment from local partners and providing nurses and staff with the training necessary to care for critically ill patients. She went above and beyond her regular duties by volunteering to live on-campus 24/7 during the exponential surge of COVID-19 infections in late 2020, remaining separated from her family for weeks at a time in order to assist nurses and staff during times of emergency. The state will recognize July 25, 2021, as Dr. Shannon Allen Day all throughout New Mexico.

Dr. Laura Banks, a professor at the University of New Mexico School of Medicine, where she serves as a leader at UNM's Center for Disaster which supports community disaster preparedness through applied disaster research, healthcare disaster planning, emergency preparedness training for responders, and disaster field services. Dr. Banks helped to create the State's Medical Advisory Team, which was instrumental in advising and guiding the state's response during the pandemic. Dr. Banks transformed the Medical Advisory Team's strategic plan and vision into functioning operations; and she ensured that an expert panel of New Mexico scientists could provide turnaround for every vaccination within hours of federal recommendations. The state will recognize July 22, 2021, as Dr. Laura Banks Day all throughout New Mexico.

Mandelyn "Mandy" Cordova, who is director of Nursing at the Guadalupe County Hospital in Santa Rosa. Mandy has dedicated her life to helping the sick, working as a nurse technician and registered nurse in the Guadalupe County Hospital for over 17 years. She exhibited great leadership during the pandemic by training and counseling new nurses, working with hospital leaders to stay abreast of constantly changing CDC guidance and best practices, coordinating drive-thru testing sites, and ensuring the hospital was equipped with the adequate personal protection equipment, testing and treatment supplies, and vaccines—all in addition to caring for the most critically ill patients. She has gone above and beyond her regular duties by volunteering to work at numerous COVID-19 testing and vaccination sites on her off-time and taking on extra shifts to fill staffing shortages. Mandy Cordova's selfless and heroic actions contributed greatly to community efforts to combat the virus in a rural part of our state. The state will recognize July 24, 2021, as Mandy Cordova Day all throughout New Mexico.

Dr. Michael Crossey, the CEO and President of TriCore Reference Laboratories. He is an internationally recognized expert in clinical laboratory medicine, and during the COVID-19 pandemic, Dr. Crossey demonstrated exemplary service by partnering with the state and quickly implementing innovative methods that significantly expanded our capacity to accurately test for COVID-19. Dr. Crossey's commitment to protecting the people of New Mexico was demonstrated by TriCore Reference Laboratories converting every viral testing machine possible to COVID PCR testing in the facility during the height of the pandemic. TriCore has performed nearly 1 million COVID-19 tests since the beginning of the pandemic, at a pace of over 60,000 per month. The state will recognize July 20, 2021, as Dr. Michael Crossey Day all throughout New Mexico.

Dr. Paul Fenimore, a scientist at Los Alamos National Laboratory; he specializes in predictive modeling and has provided exemplary service and leadership as a member of the State Medical Advisory Team. Dr. Fenimore developed a modeling framework to evaluate forecasts of COVID-19 spread and potential actions the State could implement under various scenarios; while other

states simply reacted to data from prior weeks, New Mexico's approach from the outset of the pandemic has been based on detailed modeling of the pandemic 4-6 weeks ahead, and we have Dr. Fenimore to thank for that. His dedication and accuracy with the modeling data has assisted the state with managing vaccine effectiveness, school reopening, ICU bed use expectations, and many other scenarios critical to managing the pandemic in New Mexico. The state will recognize July 23, 2021, as Dr. Paul Fenimore Day all throughout New Mexico.

Dr. Jonathan Iralu, who is the Indian Health Service Chief Clinical Consultant for Infectious Diseases; he has been treating New Mexicans and caring for his community at the Gallup Indian Medical Center since 1994. Dr. Iralu is also an instructor at Harvard Medical School and serves as a senior physician at Brigham and Women's Hospital Division of Global Health Equity in Boston, Massachusetts. He has been proactive since outset of the pandemic in taking measures to protect the people of New Mexico, establishing a drive thru COVID testing operation weeks before the first confirmed COVID-19 case in New Mexico and, throughout the pandemic, delivering timely, high-quality COVID-19 patient care to members of New Mexico's Tribes, Nations, and Pueblos. The state will recognize July 19, 2021, as Dr. Jonathan Iralu Day all throughout New Mexico.

Dr. Michael Richards, the Vice Chancellor of Clinical Affairs at the University of New Mexico Health Sciences Center. In the first few days of the pandemic, Dr. Richards stepped into a lead role with multiple delivery system partners to establish the State's Medical Advisory Team, which has been advising the state during the pandemic and has been critical to the management of COVID-19 in New Mexico. Dr. Richards was also instrumental in building a statewide healthcare delivery system which included the development of an ICU plan, which efficiently managed an overwhelming surge of COVID-19 patients in November and December of 2020, preventing catastrophe. The state will recognize July 21, 2021, as Dr. Michael Richards Day all through New Mexico.

Dr. Aja Sanzone served as the Medical Director of the Infectious Disease Bureau for the New Mexico Department of Health. She was instrumental in the development of the COVID-19 testing program, analyzing the laboratory resources available, and advising the State on how to expand New Mexico's COVID-19 testing capacity. Throughout the pandemic Dr. Sanzone traveled to nursing homes in both urban and rural locations, and walked the halls with anxious staff, helping them analyze their infection control practices and making suggestions for managing COVID-19 positive residents while limiting the risks of greater spread. She made important observations on infection control in long term care facilities that were adopted by the Department of Health and undoubtedly saved lives; and she was the energy behind the early days of our state's nation-leading vaccination effort. The state will recognize July 26 as Dr. Aja Sanzone Day all throughout New Mexico.

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