



STATE OF NEW MEXICO  
**Aging & Long-Term Services**  
**Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham**  
Katrina Hotrum-Lopez, Cabinet Secretary  
Sam Ojinaga, Deputy Cabinet Secretary

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **Aging and Long-Term Services Department Presents Budget**

*Faced with growing demand for services, Department requests funding for services to the aging*

**Santa Fe** – Faced with a high and still increasing demand for services, the Department has requested \$52.5 million to provide services to the state’s growing aging population.

“Our care of those who are the most vulnerable to COVID-19, our seniors, is at the heart of everything we’re doing,” said Katrina Hotrum-Lopez, Secretary for Aging and Long-Term Services Department. “It’s what is powering my team through sleepless nights, through the loss of loved ones, and it is why we cannot ‘scale back’, the need is simply too great. Our older generations are hurting, they’re scared, lonely, and many of them are sick. They need us now, more so than ever before.”

Thousands of homebound seniors, disabled adults, and long-term care residents have turned to the department to fulfill fundamental needs, including food insecurities and resident rights. The heightened demand for vital services has impacted every operation within the department.

“Every division and program within the State’s Aging and Long-Term Services Department [ALTSD] have seen increases in the number of people they serve,” said Secretary Hotrum-Lopez. “As a sister department to the Department of Health, the need for our direct services have soared during the pandemic placing strains on our capacity to deliver.

“In order to meet the demand for critical services to seniors while responsibly managing the budget, the Department has taken steps to redirect funds to where they are needed most. By discontinuing leases, creating operational efficiencies that reduce the operations budget, we can better fund service providers.

In addition to redirecting funds to service providers, the Department has identified three key initiatives to address these new and evolving challenges.”

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### **1. An Aging Network to Deliver Meals**

Senior Center staff across the state, have been repurposed to deliver meals to homebound seniors, coordinate grab and go meal sites, conduct welfare checks and calls, case management, volunteer recruitment, and organize flu clinics. The Aging Network has seen more than 7,000 seniors connect with the department to receive direct line services.

When COVID-19 first made its way to New Mexico, the Aging and Long-Term Services Department [ALTSD] created an entire food boxing and distribution operation, from the ground up, in order to address food insecurities for the vulnerable population of homebound, low-income seniors and adults with disabilities. This program delivered more than half a million meals. The grab and go meal sites and home delivered meals continue to address the growing need for food security.

### **2. Information Technology in Support of a Virtual Workforce**

The technology needed to support continue operations virtually for staff has increased. The department anticipates needing approximately \$1.2 million over the course of FY22 to ensure ALTSD can continue to perform their jobs and the division can maintain the information infrastructure of the department, which includes interactive platforms that will improve communication with stakeholders.

### **3. Staying Connected with Volunteers**

In this time of isolation, the ability to connect has been deeply impacted. The department has seen an increase of 63 percent in the number of people requesting services and advocacy from the State Ombudsman program, since March. Which is also in dire need of volunteers, the program needs approximately 150-200 additional ombudsman volunteers to cover the 11,000+ residents across the state who are eligible for Ombudsman services. Additionally, calls to Adult Protective Services are also trending up. In an environment where in-person communication is not possible, both divisions have been hosting trainings, presenting at virtual engagements, and marketing their services to the public.

In addition, the department has created multiple avenues to keep people connected, including the purchase and distribution of more than 300 tablets to Long-Term Care facilities across the state (so that residents can communicate with loved ones), the launch of Create & Connect (a pen pal campaign), Senior Social Hour (online content that provides educational, uplifting, and entertaining to seniors, their caregivers, and disabled adults), and multiple Tele townhalls to share information with stakeholders.

The Department has also bolstered all outreach efforts by consistently sharing content on their social media platforms which have seen followers increase by 100 fold and purchasing advertising on statewide television networks. They've identified additional priorities such as a phone banking system to contact stakeholders with important messages and a website that would link volunteer letter writers with the more than 300 long-term care facilities, and the nearly 12,000 residents across our state.

“We are living through unprecedented times, and need to adapt to this new reality if we are going to serve our state’s aging community with the services they need,” said Secretary Hotrum-Lopez.

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