**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

April 1, 2021

**State Announces On-Going Efforts to Get Persons**

**with Disabilities Vaccinated**

*Current and upcoming efforts increase COVID-19 vaccine access to individuals living with a disability*

*There will be a media availability on Thursday, April 1, 2021 at 10:30am with state officials from GCD, ALTSD, DDPC, CDHH, and CFB. Media who wish to attend should RSVP to* [*Breanna.Anderson@state.nm.us*](mailto:Breanna.Anderson@state.nm.us)

**SANTA FE** - The Governor’s Commission on Disability [GCD], Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing [CDHH], Commission for the Blind [CFB], New Mexico Department of Health [DOH], Aging and Long-Term Services Department [ALTSD], and Developmental Disabilities Planning Council [DDPC] announced a multitude of programs aimed at providing vaccines to individuals living with a disability. The state has actively been working with disability advocates and partners who have provided key feedback and support to ensure equitable vaccine access for individuals living with a disability.

The following steps have been taken in coordination with disability advocates:

* Expanding the 1B priority group to include individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities
* Prioritizing individuals with disabilities through all the senior vaccine clinics, coordinated by ALTSD
* Sun Van Pilot - transportation for individuals with a disability living in the Albuquerque area
* ADA accessibility guidance at vaccine clinics regarding physical access, equipment, and communication
* Creating a “homebound” designation in the VaccineNM.org registration portal
* Transportation accommodations coordinated through the UNM Community Health Division and ALTSD
* DOH vaccine registration portal- online accessibility as well as over-the-phone registration support for those without a cell phone or computer
* Changing the signature box on the day-of-vaccination medical questionnaire from an actual signature to a checkbox

“A critical component of New Mexico’s successful vaccine rollout is how well we plan for and respond to the needs of communities that are normally marginalized. Vaccine equity for people with disabilities is not just about distribution, but about dismantling physical and communication access barriers. We have heard and will continue to work with advocates and those living with disabilities, in order to ensure we are taking steps to increase vaccine accessibility,” said GCD Director Linnea Forsythe.

New Mexico continues to lead the nation in vaccination rates, and is moving fluidly through the priority groups. As of March 28, 70.1% of New Mexicans 75 years and older have received at least a first dose, and 57% are fully vaccinated.

“Vaccine equity means access for all. It also means working to meet the specific needs of each community,” said DOH Cabinet Secretary Dr. Tracie Collins.

GCD, DOH and ALTSD continue to collaborate to ensure New Mexico’s at-risk populations are receiving the vaccine.

“We want to thank the disability rights and advocacy community for sharing ways we can improve access and break down barriers for those with disabilities,” said ALTSD Cabinet Secretary Katrina Hotrum-Lopez. “But we’re not done yet. Until everyone with a disability who wants to get a vaccine has been vaccinated, we’ve still got work to do.”

Disability advocates have been working closely with the State to provide education and accessibility to both the registration portal as well as the COVID vaccine.

“Throughout the pandemic the state of New Mexico has continued in its efforts to engage our hearing loss community, creating, and distributing accessible videos explaining the evolving status of the restrictions, testing, and vaccines for COVID-19. The state continues to work and ensure that our most vulnerable community members with a hearing loss have the support and resources they need to visit a vaccine site effectively,” said Nathan Gomme, Executive Director of the New Mexico Commission of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing.

The New Mexico Commission for the Blind applauded the fact that New Mexico’s vaccine registration website is accessible, when other states have been criticized for their lack of site accessibility.

“New Mexico is one of very few states with vaccine registration and information web pages that are accessible to individuals who are blind, and we have worked with the web page developer to make sure registration goes as smoothly as possible,” said Greg Trapp, Executive Director of the New Mexico Commission for the Blind.

DOH officials encourage all New Mexicans 16 years and older to register for a vaccine at [vaccineNM.org](http://vaccinenm.org/) or call the Aging and Disability Resource Center at 1-800-432-2080 if you need assistance. New Mexicans who have vaccine questions can visit [vaccineNM.org/facts](https://vaccinenm.org/facts).

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