



San Miguel County Health Impact Assessment Team



In case you missed it, *The Bachelor* went to New Mexico in February 2015, and it turns out some of the contestants on the show thought that New Mexico was not part of the United States. In fact, they thought New Mexico (the U.S. state) and Mexico (the country) were the *same thing*. While New Mexicans sometimes say ‘we didn’t cross the border, the border crossed us,’ here’s a little history for Megan (bachelorette) and others who may not know . . .

On January 6, 1912, New Mexico was admitted into the United States as the 47th state. At its northwestern corner are the so-called ‘Four Corners,’ where Colorado, New Mexico, Arizona, and Utah meet. We call New Mexico the ‘Land Of Enchantment’ for a reason: it’s in the drama of sunlight and shadow playing out across juniper-speckled hills; the traditional mountain villages of horse pastures and adobe homes; and the centuries-old towns on the northern plateaus. New Mexico is the only state with an official question—“Red or green?”—referring to the choice of preferring to eat red or green chili. We are renowned for our green chili, but if you can’t make up your mind, you have to go with ‘Christmas.’ New Mexico’s heritage spans more than four and a half centuries, with a great diversity of landscapes and a rich cultural history, derived from a combination of Spanish, American Indian and European cultures.

Having learned of the existing conditions of poor overall physical health and behavioral health issues that result in higher-than-average rates of driving while intoxicated (DWI) and other addiction-related problems, violence and recidivism among those incarcerated, a group of volunteers affiliated with the San Miguel County (NM) Detention Center (SMCDC) has been working toward the specific goal of establishing an Adult Reintegration Center. While the vision of a Reintegration Center has been held for nearly a decade, little concrete progress has been made. In an attempt to further this effort, a team of diverse stakeholders from within the community was assembled and participated in a Health Impact Assessment (HIA) training, which provided detailed information about the importance of health equity, factors that contribute to individual and community state of health, and how to use a Health Impact Assessment as a tool for evaluating a proposed policy or program.

Through a literature review, as well as significant community input and key stakeholder engagement, the objective assessment was just completed, March 2015. By observing the findings of the HIA report, it is evident that the establishment of an Adult Reintegration Center and full implementation of evidence-based programming would significantly improve the health and well-being of not only those who are incarcerated as well as their families, but the entire community! In February of this year we completed the final version of the Health Impact Assessment report! Very aggressive recommendations were outlined based on findings from the literature review, the data on the existing conditions, and research into other programs linked with the three health determinants analyzed in our HIA Assessment – addiction, violence, and recidivism. The San Miguel HIA Team plans to reduce recidivism in an effort to promote public health in counties that suffer from poor health outcomes and socioeconomic disadvantages. Rooted in evidence linking incarceration and health determinants, their AHLP will strive for public health improvement through the use of Health Impact Assessment implemented as the first phase, and Health in All Policies approach implemented as the second phase! The HIA Team is confident that these endeavors will go far in helping to increase public safety and to reduce some of the exceptional problems of addiction, violence and recidivism faced by the region.

Kelly Gallagher, Ph.D.

Yolanda Cruz

Patricia A. Leahan

Patricia Gallegos

Epidemiologist, DOH

DWI Coordinator

Peace & Justice Center

Community Service Manager, DOH