

**The New Mexico Department of Veterans Services**

**Michelle Lujan Grisham** *Governor*

**DVS Hosts State of Rural Veterans**

**Transportation Conference**

DVS presented the 2022 State of Rural Veterans Transportation Conference on December 9 at the New Mexico Veterans Memorial in Albuquerque.

Representatives from transportation agencies, veterans service organizations, and community service groups were invited to discuss the lack of transportation options for many rural-area veterans. Veterans cite this as a big reason why many of them neglect their health care needs.

In his welcome remarks, DVS Secretary-Designate Donnie Quintana said that everyone in attendance needs to collectively continue working together to develop a network or system to provide transportation for veterans statewide.

“The state of New Mexico can’t do it alone. Our VA partners can’t do it alone. Our non-profit agencies can’t do it alone,” said Secretary-Designate Quintana. “But collectively, we have a great opportunity to work and leverage not only organizations, but individual strengths on how we accomplish that.”

DVS Health Care Coordination Division Director Diane Mourning Brown then gave a presentation on the DVS Highly Rural Veterans Transportation Program, which provides free round-trip rides to VA medical appointments for veterans in the following fifteen counties designated by VA as “highly rural” (less than seven veterans per square mile): Colfax, Union, Mora, Harding, San Miguel, Quay, Guadalupe, De Baca, Lincoln, Torrance, Socorro, Cibola, Catron, Sierra, and Hidalgo. She also talked about DVS developing a plan to expand its transportation service to the remaining 18 counties in the state.

Other transportation option presentations were given by New Mexico VA Health Care System (NMVAHCS) Director Robert McKenrick, NMVAHCS Veterans Transportation Service Mobility Manager Hugo Rodriguez, New Mexico Rail Runner Marketing Director Marie Mora, New Mexico Veterans Integration Centers General Services Director Tracy Kincaid, Shuttle Ruidoso President David Cason, and Disabled American Veterans/New Mexico Adjutant David Alderete.

After the presentations, there was a breakout session focusing on producing a needs assessment for providing rides efficiently for the medical needs of veterans. DVS videotaped and has [produced an edited-down version of the conference](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tU5onPKJ5bM) showing each presentation, along with the results of the breakout session.

Information from the conference will be analyzed by DVS, and additional conferences and meetings will be held in 2023 to finalize a transportation plan.

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