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Health Secretary Says New Mexico Must Address Serious Obesity Problem Department of Health Recently Awarded \$2.4 Million Grant to Increase Nutrition, Activity

(Santa Fe) – In response to Trust for America’s Health “F as in Fat” report released today, Health Secretary Alfredo Vigil, MD, said New Mexico needs to continue to strengthen its obesity-prevention efforts to address a serious problem with obesity. The report details obesity rates by states and discusses effective state policies and programs.

“We must take the problem of obesity seriously and continue to help individuals develop healthy eating and activity habits so we can prevent our obesity rate from rising further,” Dr. Vigil said.

New Mexico’s adult obesity rate is 24.6 percent from 2006-2008, a 1.1 percent increase since 2005-2007, according to the national report. The report examined rates for diabetes, adult and childhood obesity, hypertension, physical activity levels and poverty. In all categories except for poverty, New Mexico ranked in the middle of states and was not among the top 10 best or worst states. New Mexico has one of the highest rates of poverty in the country.

The report also highlighted legislation and policies that can curb obesity rates. Governor Bill Richardson implemented nutrition rules for school vending machines and food sold in schools in 2005. He has made obesity prevention a priority in his administration.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recently awarded the New Mexico Department of Health a \$2.4 million grant to address childhood obesity in the state. The Department will receive about \$600,000 each year for four years to fund physical activity and nutrition programs that motivate children to eat healthier and move more.

The Department will use the funding to strengthen collaborative anti-obesity efforts across state departments, develop consistent educational messages for the public and replicate a successful anti-obesity project in Las Cruces. The Department will also provide small grants to community organizations that have been successful in improving nutrition and increasing physical activity for children.

“Obesity is a problem in which individuals are responsible, but we also need to create healthier environments that motivate individuals to be able to make healthier food choices, increase activity time and decrease screen time,” said Patty Morris, who leads the Department’s obesity-prevention efforts.

Last year, New Mexico Department of Health launched a community-wide project, *Healthy Kids Las Cruces*, that connects and enhances community efforts to motivate children, teenagers and

families to eat healthier and be more physically active. The Department leads the project, which involves local and state government, education, health care, social services, agriculture, non-profit organizations, foundations and businesses. The Department plans to expand the initiative statewide and is working on developing a program in Chaves County and in tribal communities.

Healthy Kids Healthy New Mexico is one way the Department of Health tries to reduce obesity rates. The Department collaborates with state and local agencies and community partners across New Mexico to help communities develop policies and programs that support families in developing healthy eating and physical activity habits. Lack of physical activity and poor nutritional habits are major contributors to overweight, obesity and Type II diabetes. State-sponsored programs also include cooking classes for children and diabetics, activities for people with arthritis and nutrition education through Women, Infants and Children.

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