



Office of the Governor

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **State of New Mexico feeding thousands of children, seniors, tribal members during pandemic**

SANTA FE – State government agencies have delivered more than 5.4 million meals to children and youth, more than 293,000 meals to seniors and, separately, more than 400,000 pounds of food items to those communities most in need throughout New Mexico since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic and the initial issuance of “stay at home” directives. The state has also increased the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) enrollments and benefits to families and has implemented innovative, collaborative efforts to deliver meals to tribal communities across the state.

“I am incredibly grateful to the state employees from every community across this state who have stepped up in this crisis to make sure New Mexicans have access to nutritional food and clean water,” Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham said. “We are truly all in this together as one state government to serve the people of this state, from our tribal neighbors to the elderly to families in need and so many more.”

Keeping New Mexicans fed and increasing food security for children, youth and seniors has been achieved through extensive collaboration between the Governor’s Office, the state’s Emergency Operations Center, the Department of Homeland Security and Emergency Management along with multiple state government agencies, tribal governments, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), New Mexico farmers, food banks, meal suppliers, local governments, corporate foundations and other funders. The New Mexico National Guard has been a critical partner in making food deliveries.

The state Public Education Department and Children, Youth and Families Department continue to provide meals for children at school and community sites through federal United States Department of Agriculture waivers that made “grab and go” meals prepared in school cafeterias possible. More than 102,000 children and youth per day are receiving these meals, which they pick up at local schools or in other community locations.

PED also worked with the new Early Childhood Education and Care Department to apply for the waivers and both agencies will follow through with uninterrupted meal provision through the regular NM Summer Meals Program, which was the model for the pandemic meals to go efforts.

The state Indian Affairs Department and the CYFD are also working with the USDA to deliver meals to children and youth living in Tribal communities through a new Meals-2-You home delivery pilot program.

To date, Meals-2-You, which is supported by PepsiCo's Food for Good Foundation and Baylor University, has delivered more than 42,000 meals to children who live in tribal communities in New Mexico. In most cases, food for each child is delivered to the tribe, nation or pueblo's emergency management team for distribution. Additional waivers granted by the USDA allowed for two weeks' worth of nutritious breakfasts and lunches to be delivered at a time.

Recognizing the impact of the closure of Gallup on food and water supply, state agencies sprung into action to make sure that marginalized New Mexicans do not go hungry.

With a mission of "do right and feed everybody," the USDA also has partnered with the New Mexico Aging and Long-Term Services Department to replicate this meal delivery program to provide meals to at-risk seniors both across New Mexico and on sovereign land. The ALTSD has provided more than 293,000 meals.

All children, youth and families enrolled in the Federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program have also received the maximum available benefit for the months of March and April. The Human Services Department has worked to increase SNAP enrollment for eligible families statewide, with a spike in applications by more than 40 percent in the month of April for this food support, enrolling an estimated 316,685 additional individuals. The department also provided an increased monthly stipend to households that did not receive the maximum SNAP benefits during the months of March and April with an average increase of \$120 per household.

New Mexico families will receive more than \$97 million in additional food benefits – enough to feed about 245,000 vulnerable children – following federal approval of a Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer Program.

New Mexico households with children who receive free or reduced-price meals will receive benefits of \$5.70 per child, per day for the 70-day period from March 16, 2020 when public schools were closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, through June 19, 2020. New Mexico households can receive Pandemic-EBT as well as continue to receive food distributions from their child's school site. This will be deposited directly to existing EBT cards for families already receiving aid.

The Pandemic-EBT program will also benefit families that did not previously qualify for free or reduced-price meals but may now qualify due to changes in their household's circumstances as a result of the restrictions implemented for non-essential businesses because of the COVID-19 response. Those families should contact their school district food service office to apply for benefits. If determined eligible, their children will receive Pandemic-EBT, and the benefit will be issued for the month determined eligible through June.

Families in need of free breakfasts and lunches for children under the age of 18, can find the closest meal distribution location [here](#). Disabled adults or seniors in need of food assistance can call 800-432-2080. Tribal members should reach out to their local emergency operations center for information on food and water distribution on Tribal land.

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