

PROJECT NARRATIVE: This application is for the rural communities award category and will serve the remote northern area of the Doña Ana County, New Mexico (DAC), comprised of the largely Hispanic communities of Hatch, Salem, Garfield, Rincon, and Radium Springs.

STATEMENT OF NEED. Spanning 65 miles of the U.S.-Mexico border, DAC encompasses nearly 4,000 square miles. About half of the county's 218,195 residents live in rural communities outside the county seat of Las Cruces. COVID-19 has infected more than 11% of the county population and led to 432 deaths as of April 14, 2021. The northern region of the county, population 84% Hispanic (primarily of Mexican descent), has been disproportionately affected, with 14% of residents testing positive for COVID-19. Poverty, which reaches 58% in the Salem area, and Hispanic ethnicity render this population vulnerable to COVID-19. In New Mexico, Latinx populations have been affected by COVID at twice the rate of whites and 1.7 times that of Blacks.¹ Census tracts with a poverty rate of 40% or greater show rates of COVID-19 hospitalization nearly three times (11.12% vs 4.73%) those of areas with a poverty rate of 5% or less.² New Mexico's COVID-19 case fatality rate for high poverty zones is 3.35%, compared to 1.36% for wealthier communities. These disparities correlate with lack of access to culturally appropriate, accurate, health-literate information. The majority (72%) of the region's population speaks Spanish at home, and 28.5% of adults do not have a high school diploma,³ increasing the risk that they will have difficulty accessing, understanding, and acting on health information, and increasing their susceptibility to misinformation. To further understand the health literacy needs of this population and develop a disparities impact statement, Doña Ana County Health and

¹ https://cv.nmhealth.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/State-Report_demographics_04.12.21.pdf

² https://cv.nmhealth.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/State-Report_healthsocial_04.12.21.pdf

³ <https://ibis.health.state.nm.us/indicator/view/NMPopDemoEduc.Sarea.html>

Human Services Department (DAC HHSD), with technical support from Crimson Research at New Mexico State University, will identify publicly available data and establish a health literacy network to perform a community assessment.

PROPOSED APPROACH: The *Salud y Vida con Amigos* project will fund the collaborative planning, development, and delivery of a bilingual (Spanish/English) health literacy education initiative to 1) provide health-literate COVID-19 information and education to the target population, 2) train community health workers (CHWs) and health professionals in best-practice health literate communication techniques. DAC HHSD will facilitate the collaborative development and delivery of a health literacy action plan that incorporates National CLAS standards to increase the availability, acceptability, and use of COVID-19 information and services in the rural agricultural communities of northern DAC. Stakeholders will identify health literacy challenges and create a sustained collaboration to address health literacy.

Three curricula will be developed and delivered virtually or in-person: one for Community Health Workers (CHWs) including DAC HHSD county outreach staff, faith-based leaders, county extension agents, and other community leaders, one for CHWs to deliver to community residents, and the third for clinical health-care professionals. Participants will learn to use best practices in health literacy including universal precautions, clear, plain language explanations, “teach-back” methods to check understanding, and shared decision-making, and methods for navigating the COVID-19 “infodemic” of mis- and dis-information. All curricula will be based on the Health Care Education Association "Patient Education Practice Guidelines for Health Care Professionals."⁴ Curricula will be piloted during the first year of the funding

⁴ www.hcea.org

period and adapted based on evaluation results. Outcomes will be used to develop a replicable model for rural and/or US-Mexico border communities.

Project Goals and Objectives

Goal 1. Improve residents' ability to access, understand, and act on health information, focusing on COVID-19 prevention, vaccination, and improved adherence to public health practices.

Objective 1.1 By August 1, 2021, identify and begin dissemination of existing culturally relevant COVID-19 health education materials in northern DAC. *Objective 1.2* By January 1, 2021, CHWs begin to deliver the culturally and linguistically relevant health literacy curriculum developed for the project to community members. Topics will include COVID-19 public health measures, questioning health-care practitioners, and participating in their own and family members' care [HC/HIT-03][HC/HIT-D1]. *Objective 1.3* Within 6 months, develop and deploy website, texting app, and locally produced educational materials (print and online), to deliver timely, plain language information about COVID-19 public health measures to community members. *Objective 1.4* By August 1, 2021 install 6 wifi hotspots for information access.

Goal 2: Increase the capacity of community health workers, community leaders, and clinical staff to provide accurate, culturally responsive, health-literate information so community members can find, understand, and act on COVID-19 health information (see Appendix 1).

Objective 2.1 By November 1, 2021, develop and deploy a training curriculum for CHWs in best-practices in COVID-19 communications. *Objective 2.2* By January 1, 2022, develop and deploy a training curriculum for clinical staff in best-practices in COVID-19 health literacy addressing Healthy People objectives: HC/HIT-01, HC/HIT-02, HC/HIT-03.

Goal 3: Create a sustainable collaborative network to improve personal and organizational health literacy and conduct health literacy activities in southern New Mexico. *Objective 3.1* By August

1, 2021, host first monthly network partnership meeting to inform organizations of project goals and partner roles and responsibilities. *Objective 3.2* Beginning by October 1, 2021 and continuing quarterly throughout the funding period, host quarterly “learning circles” with stakeholders. *Objective 3.3* By October 1, 2021, develop disparities impact statement. *Objective 3.4* By October 15, 2021, collaboratively develop a health literacy action plan to address the health information needs of northern Doña Ana County residents. *Objective 3.5* By April 1, 2023, finalize a sustainability plan to maintain network and services.

Goal 4: Collaboratively develop a plan to sustain adherence to public health recommendations, both for COVID-19 and other health issues, including future public health emergencies.

Objective 4.1 By July 1, 2023, engage in sustainability planning to establish replicable mechanisms to identify, create, distribute, and use health literacy interventions appropriate for rural U.S.-Mexico border populations. *Objective 4.2* By June 1, 2023, incorporate a sustainability plan into County emergency response policies.

Projected Outcomes: 1) Increased ability of 10% of the target population to access, understand, and use health information, especially COVID-19 public health recommendations; 2) Increased capacity of at least 100 CHWs and community leaders to effectively communicate health information using national CLAS standards; 3) Increased capacity of 100 clinical workers to use best practices in health literacy using national CLAS standards as defined by Healthy People 2030; and 4) Establishment of a sustainable health literacy network in DAC.

ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY: DAC will use existing resources, including community resource centers, outreach staff, and network relationships, to assure immediate start-up. Prior to the grant award, DAC will: complete pre-recruitment activities, including approval of project staff job postings and contract award templates; provide project orientation to existing outreach

staff; plan project evaluation with Evaluator; assess interest in project participation of area health-care professionals; identify existing health-literate materials for similar populations.

Crimson Research (CR) will serve as independent, external evaluators for this project. CR is housed within the College of Health and Social Services, a component organization of New Mexico State University (NMSU) and is located in Las Cruces, NM, DAC. NMSU is a Minority-serving and state land-grant university committed to community outreach and partnerships. CR specializes in assisting community agencies with their applied research needs, which includes program evaluation, survey research, and other social science research methods. CR will provide process, outcome, and impact evaluation for this project. Evaluators will assess four program goals and 12 objectives across the two-year time frame that relate directly to the outcomes of the project: factors related to the success of the program, and barriers to goal attainment. CR will monitor this project by adhering to a continuous quality improvement (QI) and data tracking system. This process will involve (1) Monthly meetings with project team and evaluators; (2) Quarterly reports of progress towards objectives including project data; and (3) Regular data retrieval from project partners (See Appendix 1). Evaluators will be responsible for culling relevant data for conducting statistical analyses, writing summary reports of statistical data and disseminating this information to the project team. All evaluation activities will be completed under the supervision of the NMSU Institutional Review Board (IRB).