

Healthy YOU 2024

YOUR GUIDE TO LIVING RIGHT



THE LAS CRUCES
Bulletin

WINTER VIRUS

PG2

FACE IT

PG8

BLOOD DRIVE

PG6

Bulletin
HEAL+H

LOCAL HOSPITALS OFFER TIPS ON NAVIGATING WINTER VIRUS SEASON

GENERAL TIPS FOR WINTER VIRUSES

- **UPDATE VACCINATIONS FOR FLU, SARS-COV-2 AND RSV IF INDICATED.**
- **WASH HANDS FREQUENTLY USING SOAP.**
- **COVER COUGHS AND SNEEZES.**
- **OPEN WINDOWS, VENTILATE CLOSED SPACES.**
- **AVOID SICK PEOPLE, STAY HOME IF YOU ARE SICK.**
- **WHEN SICK, AVOID FAMILY AND FRIENDS OR WEAR A MASK.**
- **AVOID DEHYDRATION WHILE SICK.**

ALGERNON D'AMMASSA
Las Cruces Bulletin

Influenza, RSV and SARS-CoV-2 (which causes Covid-19) are driving higher rates of hospitalization and pressure on hospitals this winter.

During a recent visit to MountainView Regional Medical Center in Las Cruces, most of the hospital's ICU beds were full and nearly all of the patients were presenting with respiratory distress, said Dr. Vinay Shet, a physician at the hospital.

"Most of the patients that come in (this winter) are

flu patients," he said, "and some have been really sick, especially our elderly population, have been really sick with flu and getting pneumonia."

But it's not only the elderly: Shet said middle aged and younger patients are passing through as well, while patients with underlying conditions such as lung or heart disease, or prescriptions that suppress immunity, struggle to recover.

"Fall and winter are a time when viruses that cause respiratory disease usually circulate more heavily in the community,"

Blanca Scott, director of infection prevention at Memorial Medical Center in Las Cruces, wrote. "Some seasons are more severe than others based on strains of the virus' circulation and our immunity to these viruses. One of the measures of the severity of a season is how many people are sick enough to be hospitalized."

Flu sickened at least 14 million Americans this season as of Jan. 6, accounting for 150,000 hospitalizations and 9,400 deaths, per data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Influenza-like activity in New Mexico was among the highest in the U.S. According to Scott, influenza-like illnesses in the state stand "around 7 to 10 percent above the national base line and at a higher rate than



Hospital physician Vinay Shet, M.D., is seen at MountainView Regional Medical Center in Las Cruces.

(LAS CRUCES BULLETIN PHOTO BY ALGERNON D'AMMASSA)

surrounding states."

She said respiratory illness currently accounted for 10 to 15 percent of visits to the emergency room.

Covid-19 hospitalizations also ramped up between Nov. 4 and Jan. 6, with 35,801 during the latter week, although the season's volume remained below last winter's peak.

Respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) results in up to 80,000 hospitalizations among young children and up to 160,000 for adults over 65, annually, and causes thousands of deaths.

Enhancing the risk are low rates of updated vaccine uptake for flu and SARS-CoV-2. In

December, the

CDC issued a health advisory urging providers to deliver more immunizations for all three viruses to eligible patients, after flu hospitalizations increased 200 percent over a four-week period, along with increases in Covid hospitalizations (51 percent) and RSV (60 percent).

"Low vaccination rates, coupled with ongoing increases in national and international respiratory disease activity caused by multiple pathogens ... could lead to more severe disease and increased healthcare capacity strain in the coming weeks," the agency stated in the advisory.

Vaccination data as of Jan. 12 showed just over 21 percent of adults were up to date on Covid vaccinations, while less than 47 percent had received a recent flu shot and 20 percent of citizens 60 years old and up had taken the recently introduced RSV vaccine.

While vaccines and

THE LAS CRUCES Bulletin

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Las Cruces Bulletin

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Bulletin
HEALTH



A view above the main entrance to MountainView Regional Medical Center in Las Cruces.

(LAS CRUCES BULLETIN PHOTO BY ALGERNON D'AMMASSA)

boosters do not necessarily prevent infection, Shet explained, “it’s going to be a milder form of infection ... you may have some mild to moderate symptoms which last, give or take, about three to four days, but it’s nowhere near as severe as when you get sick without the vaccine.”

Scott also pointed to lagging vaccinations in the state: “This year, fewer New Mexicans received an annual flu shot, with only around 25 percent of eligible people (receiving) the vaccine. There is still plenty of vaccine available in our community.”

Prevention and slowing spread

Shet reviewed common strategies for preventing infection and slowing the spread of respiratory viruses:

“If you’re sick, stay home. If someone is sick, stay away from them. If you can’t, at least wear a mask,” he said, “and if you are sick, yes, wear a mask, stay in the house away from family and friends while you’re sick. Wash your hands — the best advice is to wash your hands, multiple times.”

Although the trio are often referred to as “winter viruses,” the reason for increases in airborne illness in the colder months, Shet explained, was reduced ventilation in homes and offices as windows are kept shut for warmth.

If one must go out while having symptoms, he urged masking and avoiding establishments that prohibit masking. “It’s like wildfire. If you don’t take care, it will just keep on spreading. ... People who are really at that high-risk population can get sick, and we do see them, getting sick to the point where they have to be in the ICU, stay in the hospital for a prolonged period of time, sometimes have a breathing tube down their throats.”

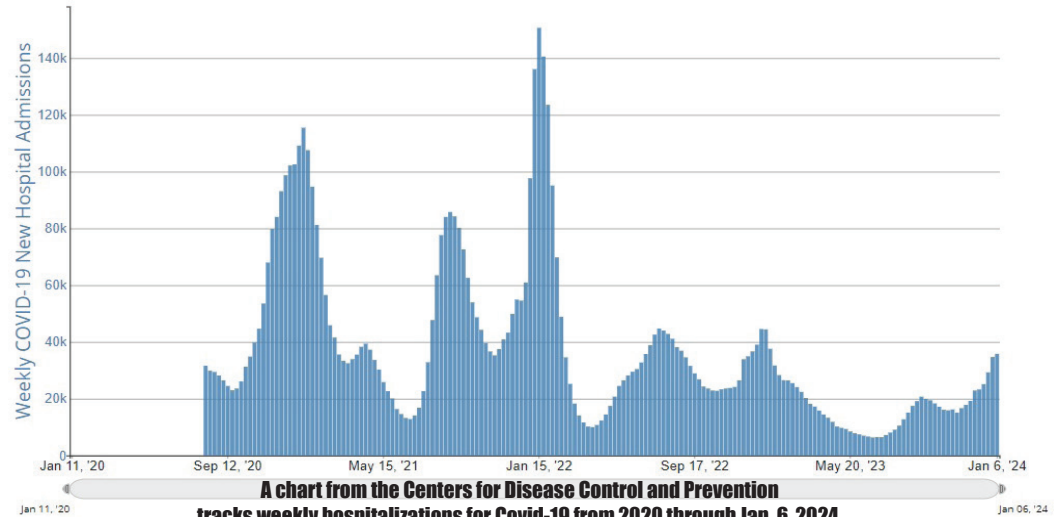
When is it time to seek medical attention outside the home? First and foremost, Shet pointed to problems breathing, coughing until one is short of breath, losing the ability to carry out daily activity because one is short of breath or too fatigued to get up, or continuous fevers requiring round-the-

clock medication.

Frequently, dehydration results in home patients with upset stomachs who forego eating and drinking even though, according to Shet, nutrition and fluids are exactly what they need.

“Dehydration causes more complications and issues with kidneys and liver than anything else,” he said. “The virus will run its course. If you’re not in that high-risk population group, your body will fight it out most of the time. But then if you don’t eat or drink and you keep on taking the Tylenol or Ibuprofen or Naproxen, that causes more issues with your stomach, so it’s a vicious cycle.”

COVID-19 New Hospital Admissions, by Week, in The United States, Reported to CDC



A chart from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention tracks weekly hospitalizations for Covid-19 from 2020 through Jan. 6, 2024.



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MOBILE CRISIS UNIT LOOKS TO FUTURE AFTER DEBUT YEAR

JUSTIN GARCIA

Las Cruces Bulletin

Project LIGHT wears its mission in its name.

The acronym LIGHT stands for “Lessen the Incidence of Grief, Harm and Trauma.” The title belongs to a unique Las Cruces Fire Department team of paramedics and licensed social workers who respond to people in a mental health crisis.

The project launched on March 6, 2023, to reduce the frequency of grief, harm and trauma in Las Cruces. In year one, city officials feel it has achieved that goal.

“We’re pretty happy with the way it’s going,” City Manager Ifo Pili said in an interview with the Las Cruces Bulletin. “But we’re going to have to wait to see how we can improve over the next few months.”

The year saw Project LIGHT receive news coverage, much of it local, but some extending all the way to the United Kingdom in an article published in The

Guardian and written by Searchlight New Mexico. The team also responded to 940 calls in its first year – an average of about three calls per day.

According to data from the LCFD, about half the calls were strictly mental health related. About 40 percent required multiple interventions such as mental health and medical. Most calls ended with transportation to a mental health provider or the patient receiving treatment on-scene.

“The LIGHT teams have been a resounding success,” Las Cruces Police Department Chief Jeremy Story said during a city council presentation in August 2023. “They’ve enabled the police department to focus on safety while the mental health professionals focus on providing the best care possible and plugging people into resources they need.”

Now, Project LIGHT looks to the future.



Matthew Hiles, a battalion chief with LCFD who oversees Project LIGHT and the department's Mobile Integrated Healthcare Program, is seen during a presentation to city council on July 24, 2023.

Matthew Hiles, a battalion chief with LCFD who oversees Project LIGHT and the department's Mobile Integrated Healthcare Program, said Project LIGHT has two goals for the future.

First, build a place for Project LIGHT to call home. The Project

LIGHT teams operate out of Fire Station 1, the main headquarters on Picacho Avenue across from the Thomas Brannigan Memorial Library.

“To be honest, we’re housed over here at station one and things are actually they’re just really

tight,” Hiles said.

As of now, Hiles said, the plan is to demolish the old Fire Station 3 located on Valley Drive near the W. Hadley Avenue intersection. The building was made obsolete after the city

completed the new Fire Station 3 right next door as part of a 2018 GO Bond project.

Hiles said a new building for Project LIGHT and the Mobile Integrated Healthcare Program would improve outcomes.

“It’s also going to give some space for our teams to have a moment and decompress,” Hiles said. “Right now, there’s really nowhere to do that.”

The second goal involves filling that new space with more employees.

Under its current setup, Project LIGHT has five employees. The team members include licensed masters’ in social work Allison Stoner and Mendy Fowler, paramedics Myke Torres and Korina Jimenez and case manager Wes Smith. The group breaks into two

teams covering different parts of the day.



The Project LIGHT teams are transported in labeled SUVs.

Courtesy photo by City of Las Cruces

But that means if the team is out and a second call comes in, there's currently no way to respond to it. It also means that the absence of a team member stifles Project LIGHT: "When one person is out, the whole team is out," Hiles said.

Growing the team will require more money. Currently, Project LIGHT is funded by the city of Las Cruces through the LCFD's budget, although the program has been the subject of federal grants. Project LIGHT has been awarded about \$1 million, Hiles said, but Project LIGHT hasn't received that money.

"So definitely adding personnel down the road is going to be beneficial for the public," Hiles said.

But one thing Hiles said will stay the same in the future is the use of the model.

Las Cruces is one of many cities in America to implement a non-police crisis intervention team. But some other cities rely on a "crisis now" model of care.

The Crisis Now model works like this: A person experiencing a crisis or a person adjacent to a crisis will call the crisis team directly, or their call will be routed via 988. Then a team like Project LIGHT will arrive on the scene and treat or transport the person. Typically, there are no police or other traditional first responders at the scene.

That's not how Las Cruces' Project LIGHT works. Instead, Project LIGHT operates alongside a cadre of first responders. When someone calls 911 with a crisis, it's up to the 911 dispatcher to call on Project LIGHT or the police officer responsible for securing the scene to request Project LIGHT's presence. This practice falls under the category of the co-responder model.

The major criticism of the co-responder model involves incarceration. Because police officers participate in the response, many outcomes can lead to someone experiencing a crisis ending up in jail. In Las Cruces' case,

about 20 percent of Project LIGHT's interactions end with the person being jailed, according to statistics presented in July 2023.

Hiles said he understands the criticism but feels that LCPD officers effectively use the teams at the correct times to ensure good outcomes.

"It's helping them out tremendously with de-escalating situations that maybe could have gotten a little out of hand," Hiles said. "They're also requesting the LIGHT teams preemptively, even sometimes before they get them on the scene."



MENTAL HEALTH



RESOURCES

Dial 988, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week,

for emotional, mental, behavioral, or substance misuse support. Service is available in English and Spanish with interpretation service in numerous other languages.

Some other local resources include:

Aggie Health and Wellness Center

(For New Mexico State University students)
3080 Breland Drive, on NMSU campus
575-646-6428
Wellness.nmsu.edu

Ben Archer Health Center

1998 Motel Blvd., Las Cruces
575-541-5941
BAHCNM.org
(School-based clinics in local schools as well)

La Clinica de Familia

385 Calle de Alegria, Las Cruces
575-525-4805
LaClinicaDeFamilia.org

Las Cruces Vet Center

(For combat veterans)
1120 Commerce Dr., Las Cruces
575-523-9826

Mesilla Valley Hospital

(In-patient only)
3751 Del Rey Blvd., Las Cruces
575-382-3500
MesillaValleyHospital.com

Peak Behavioral Health Hospital

5055 McNutt Road, Santa Teresa
888-258-1356
PeakBehavioral.com

Giving blood, a matter of life



BY
ELVA K.
ÖSTERREICH
Las Cruces Bulletin

Everybody thinks someone else will give blood, so they don't need to, said Monique Hilverding, a Las Cruces manager with Vitalant Blood Donation.

"They don't realize nobody likes needles," she said. "But it's so important and really not that bad. After a moment of discomfort, I think most people feel a sense of pride."

Hilverding said five years ago,

A Vitalant-operated mobile blood drive on the Las Cruces campus of New Mexico State University, Jan. 18, 2024.

(LAS CRUCES BULLETIN PHOTO BY ALGERNON D'AMMASSA)

the company brought together blood service entities across the nation, like United Blood Services in New Mexico to form a united whole under Vitalant. The nonprofit was founded in 1943 and Hilverding herself has been part of the company in Las Cruces for 17 years.

"I love this community," she said. "It really is an amazing thing to be doing."

The need in the area is to collect 125 units of blood a day. This is done through blood drives both large and small as well as collection in the local office at 1200 Commerce Drive in Las Cruces.

"We are always looking for new places," she said. "We always need volunteers and donors. There are a lot of ways for the community to get involved. We struggle, nationally. Three percent of people give blood."

Currently Vitalant has a two-day supply of blood going out to the 19 southern New Mexico and El Paso hospitals that use the service. The goal is to have a five-day supply, she said.

The number one reason people don't choose to give is fear of blood or needles and the fear of passing out, she said.

Hilverding said many people think blood is mostly needed when major events occur, but everyday personal things happen all the time.

"Everyday someone is dealing with something – car accidents, cancer, premature babies, surgeries," she said. "I do it as often as my body will let me, three times a year. If everyone who donates did three times a year, we wouldn't have a shortage."

To give blood, she said, you need to feel well

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GIVING BLOOD | from 6

and healthy. Take your ID and eat something; prepare to receive a mini-physical. You can take a short questionnaire on the vitalant.org website or just go in and they will ask you the questions. Rules over donor eligibility are constantly changing: For example, for a long time you had to wait a year after getting a tattoo before giving blood, but now you don't have to wait at all.

Jennifer Jimenez, director of laboratory services at Mountain View Regional Medical Center, described the process.

"You go through a screening process," she said. "They ask several questions to ensure you are capable of giving blood that is safe. There is a reclining chair, a needle stick, and they start dispensing

blood in a machine that cleans out the blood and puts some fluids back in the body – filling bags. Afterward the individual sits for a while to make sure they are OK and gets a snack and juice to build up sugars."

Nationally blood product supplies are extremely low because people have become afraid of donating, Jimenez said. She would especially like to see people with rare blood types go and give blood.

"It's a safe process, a lifesaving process," she said. "That is why we host a lot of these blood draws so we can help in area. I highly recommend people come in. It helps with trauma – big car wrecks, falls."



BLOOD AND PLASMA DONATIONS	Biomat USA	CSL Plasma	Vitalant Blood Donation
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Bringing medical rigor to looking good

ZACHARY SIMMONS

For the Bulletin

At Face It Hydrate Med Spa, luxury spa treatments and quality medical care are two sides of the same coin. Sonda Boulware — who holds a Doctor of Nursing Practice degree and is a board-certified acute care nurse practitioner — and her staff at Face It offer IV hydration, health-supporting injections, cosmetic treatments, laser tattoo removal and a guided weight loss program.

Though New Mexico has lax legal standards around many spa, cosmetic and aesthetic procedures, Boulware and her staff hold Face It to the standard of clinical medicine, including in selection and maintenance of equipment and furniture. Treatments that would be extremely simple at other spas receive a medical-class upgrade at Face It. Where other spas might offer a skin treatment with over-the-counter lotions, a basic skincare routine at Face It might include the use of a skinwave machine that uses a four-step chemical process to repair and rejuvenate skin.

The union of cosmetic treatment and medical responsibility at Face It is exemplified by their weight-loss program. In fact, the inspiration for Face It was

Boulware's desire to offer effective and affordable semaglutide treatments to patients, which she was unable to do as part of her cardiology practice.

Face It's weight loss program starts with semaglutide compound injections. Semaglutide, better known by its brand names Ozempic and Wegovy, slows down the digestive system, giving the patient a full stomach feeling faster and for longer than normal. However, the injections are only one step in Face It's weight loss program.

The staff work with patients' primary care physicians to make sure that semaglutide compound injections are the right choice. The team also monitors patients' progress. "That's what makes our program very different," Boulware said. "We're in contact with [our patients] usually at least once a week."

The Face It team works with patients to create a treatment plan that includes lifestyle and diet changes to promote lasting results. The team addresses possible side effects of semaglutide as well. By walking patients through every step of the process, Face It's weight loss program has seen many successes, Boulware said, adding that for most patients, "their biggest complaint is that they have to go and buy a new wardrobe."

The luxury cosmetic treatments at Face It work hand in hand with the more medically intensive procedures like the weight-loss program. In Boulware's experience, combining weight-loss treatments with cosmetic and self-care procedures can help patients stay on a healthy path. She says if patients "look in the mirror and like what they see, they'll exercise, they will eat better, they will take their medications, they will do the things that they're asked to do."

Many of these cosmetic treatments are spearheaded by esthetician Arlie Borde. Borde maintains an entire double cabinet full of creams, salves, chemical peels, sunscreens, lotions and more. These solutions range from everyday-use anti-aging and moisturizing creams to specifically formulated compounds intended as aftercare for Face It's other cosmetic procedures.

It's "top-of-the-line stuff that you can only get" from licensed clinicians, says Borde,

"you can't just go and get this stuff at Ulta in the mall."

Across all of their procedures, Face It maintains a focus on safety and clinical best practices. Take Face It's approach to their IV hydration and injections: While Face It offers IV drips for everything from allergies to hangovers, Face It always has trained nurses on site to assess patients and make sure they're getting the proper care. For instance, if a patient comes in seeking an IV or injection for a problem that is too severe for an IV or injection remedy, then Face It's medical personnel have the experience and training necessary to refer the patient to the proper medical facility.

Face It's care is designed to not only be clinical but personal as well. The staff aims to personalize each patient's care, giving them exactly what they need. Tami Glover, one of Face It's nurses, says, "I love interacting with all our clients that come in and educating them. I love it."

Boulware said Face It's brand of high-end med spa treatments is finding a growing clientele, including visitors from neighboring states.

"My favorite part is, I love it when people meet their goals," she added. "It is so exciting to see."



Tami Glover, Sonda Boulware and Arlie Borde
of Face It Hydrate Med Spa in Las Cruces
(Las Cruces Bulletin photos by Zachary Simmons)



Esthetician Arlie Borde of
Face It Hydrate Med Spa in Las Cruces.
(Las Cruces Bulletin photos by Zachary Simmons)

La Cueva guided hike on Jan. 27

BULLETIN REPORT

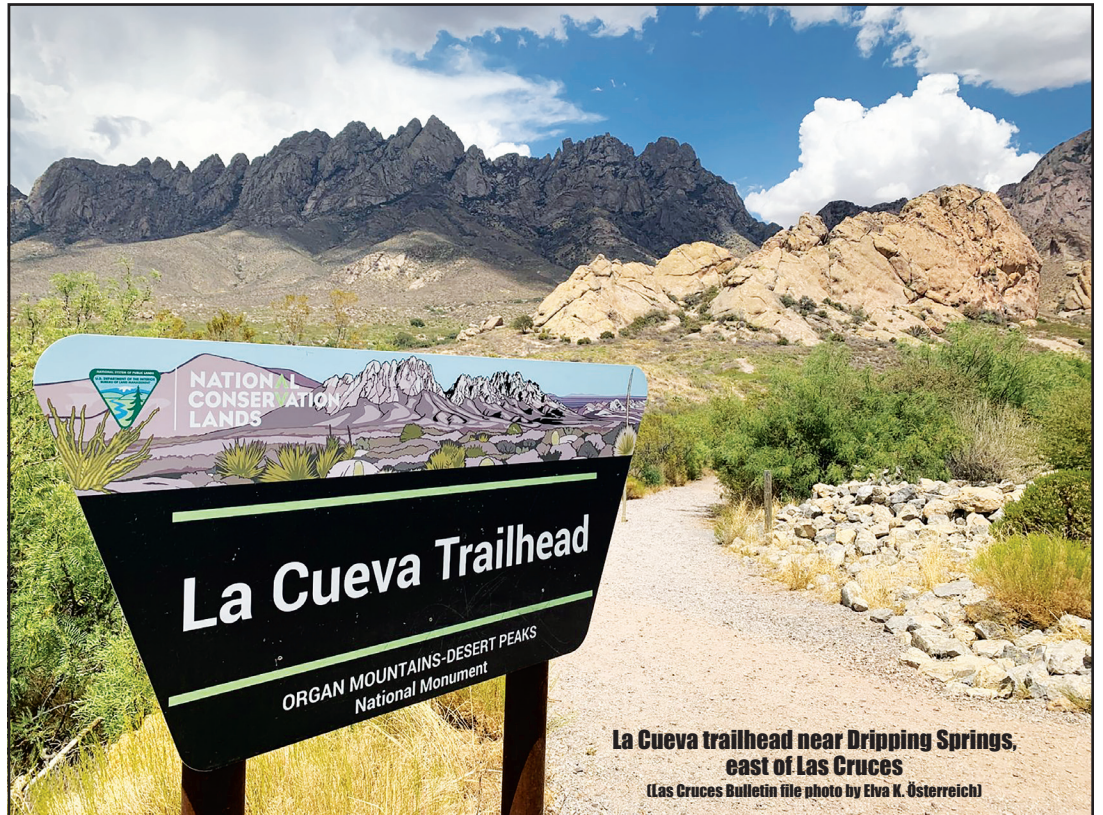
Las Cruces Bulletin

The nonprofit Friends of the Organ Mountains Desert Peaks is presenting a free guided hike at the La Cueva Archeological site, a rock shelter at the foot of the Organ Mountains of Doña Ana County, from the Ice Canyon trailhead. The event is scheduled from 2 p.m. to 4:30 p.m., and RSVPs are available online at OrganMountainsDesertPeaks.org/docent-hikes.

The organization describes the hike as easy or

intermediate, at a distance of about three miles with some steep climbs. Recommended gear consists of good hiking shoes, sunscreen/bug spray, snacks and drinking water. Pets are prohibited on the trails, per the Bureau of Land Management.

Although the informational hike is free, there is a \$5 day use fee to park at the La Cueva lot, off the east end of Dripping Springs Road at the La Cueva Picnic Area. From Interstate 25, take exit 1 (University Avenue/Dripping Springs Road) and drive eastbound to the end.



La Cueva trailhead near Dripping Springs, east of Las Cruces
(Las Cruces Bulletin file photo by Elva K. Österreich)



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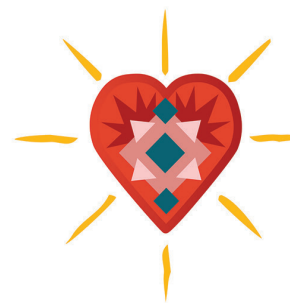
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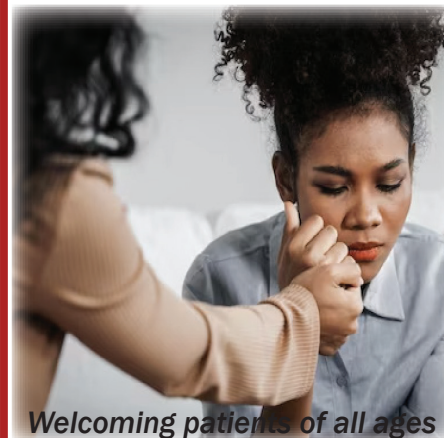
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Medical cannabis program continues to shrink

BULLETIN REPORT

Las Cruces Bulletin

The number of patients enrolled in New Mexico's medical cannabis program peaked in May 2022 at 135,388. Since then, the number of enrolled patients has sloped downward, hitting 83,663 in December, according to data from the New Mexico Department of Health — a 38.2 percent drop from the peak.

In Doña Ana County, 12,641 patients were enrolled in the program, administered by the health department. That's the third-highest patient count by county in the state, behind Santa Fe (14,329) and Bernalillo (45,025).

New Mexico legalized cannabis for medical use in 2007 under the Lynn and Erin Compassionate Use Act.

The health department and state cannabis regulators attribute the downturn to the legalization of cannabis for non-medical use by adults, a law passed in 2021 that created a regulated commercial marketplace in April 2022, just as the medical cannabis program was at its highest enrollment.

The state's largest cannabis retailer, Ultra Health, has blamed the decline on "high prices and a lack of available medicine, pushing patients out of the existing medical model into the illicit market," in a written statement in November.



Green Goods cannabis dispensary in Las Cruces.
(Las Cruces Bulletin file photo)

This, despite enrolled patients being able to access cannabis free of taxes, whereas purchases for adult or "recreational" use are subject to gross receipts tax in addition the state's cannabis excise tax.

The most common qualifying condition for enrolled patients in New Mexico is Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (74,006), followed by severe chronic pain (40,519) and cancer (6,801). Nearly 30 primary conditions are documented in the December patient report. A new condition, insomnia, became the 30th qualifying condition was added on June 1 of last year, but no enrolled patients had it listed as their qualifying condition in December.

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