The following are summary minutes of the Senior Programs Advisory Board meeting held on Thursday, February 11, 2021, at 9:00 a.m. via Zoom Webinar in Las Cruces, New Mexico.

MEMBERS PRESENT:
- Chair Judy Chavarria, Member-at-Large
- Secretary Jo Ann Rodriguez-Haught, Frank O’Brien Papen Center Representative
- Dr. Abel L. Chavarria, District 1 Representative
- Sharlene Wittern, District 3 Representative
- Rick Jackson, District 4 Representative
- Cheryl De Young, Benavidez Center Representative

MEMBERS ABSENT:
- Vice Chair Rudy Alvarez, Eastside Center Representative
- Manuel Contreras, District 5 Representative
- Etta Kaufman, District 6 Representative
- Gabriel Montalvo, Munson Center Representative

GUESTS PRESENT:
- Sonia Saldana, Senior Programs Administrator
- Jill Aguirre, Quality of Life Senior Office Manager
- Jessica Rivera, Presbyterian Health Plan, Inc.
- Toni Flores, Recording Secretary

I. CALL TO ORDER: Chair Judy Chavarria, Member-at-Large Representative, called the Senior Programs’ Advisory Board meeting to order at 9:00 a.m. on Thursday, February 11, 2021, via Zoom Webinar in Las Cruces, NM.

II. ROLL CALL: A quorum was ascertained.

III. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE: The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Rick Jackson, District 4 Representative.

IV. MOMENT OF SILENCE: Chair Judy Chavarria asked the Board to observe a moment of silence and to especially remember the Police Officer that was killed in the line of duty near Las Cruces.

V. CONFLICT OF INTEREST: Board members had no conflict of interest with any item of business on the agenda.

VI. INTRODUCTIONS: No members of the public were introduced.

VII. PUBLIC COMMENT: There was no public comment.

VIII. ACTION ITEM(S): Cheryl De Young, Benavidez Center Representative, moved to approve the minutes of the January 14, 2021 Senior Programs Advisory Board meeting as presented. R. Jackson seconded the motion. Vote: 5-0; 1 Abstained-Sharlene Wittern. Motion carried.

IX. DISCUSSION ITEMS - SENIOR PROGRAMS ADMINISTRATOR’S REPORT: Sonia Saldana, Senior Programs Administrator, provided an update on the COVID-19 vaccine registrations for seniors. She reported 11 of the Senior Programs’ staff have been trained by the
New Mexico Department of Health (DOH) to assist seniors with the COVID-19 vaccine registration process. Since the staff now has access to the DOH’s portal, staff identified several individuals 75 years of age and older with incomplete applications in the database. Staff is now reaching out to these individuals to complete the registration process. To date, Senior Programs’ staff have helped 500 individuals complete their COVID-19 vaccination application and distributed over 1300 COVID-19 vaccination related informational fact sheets. The State of New Mexico requested Senior Programs’ staff provide assistance to not only Senior Programs’ participants attending the centers, but also to all seniors in the community. S. Saldana stated it has been a challenge because Senior Programs does not have the manpower. Senior Programs will continue to work through these challenges in partnership with the New Mexico Aging and Long-Term Care Services Department. S. Saldana announced Senior Programs is coordinating its efforts with the New Mexico Non-Metro Area Agency on Aging (NMAAA) to schedule COVID-19 vaccination clinics for individuals 75 years of age and older. This will help to ensure that the most vulnerable population is vaccinated if they choose to do so. More details will be provided as soon as the information becomes available.

Dr. Abel Chavarria expressed concern for the homebound clients. He inquired if anyone is working with the homebound population to get them vaccinated. S. Saldana stated one of the major challenges for the homebound seniors seems to be transportation. For this reason, the Senior Programs’ case managers are working with the homebound individuals to ensure they have transportation to and from the vaccination sites. The case managers work with the clients’ family members, friends, and community resources to get them the assistance that they need. She also reported staff continue to do a phenomenal job serving the meals. In celebration of Valentine’s Day, Senior Programs will provide a frozen pizza for the meal program participants. S. Saldana explained Senior Programs does not contract with the NMAAA to provide weekend frozen meals to the congregate meal program participants. However, Senior Programs has been providing these meals during the pandemic as a service to seniors who do not want to interact with others. C. De Young stated a friend of hers that receives meals on wheels has opted to stop receiving the frozen meals, because the quality of the meals has declined. She stated sometimes her friend does not receive milk with her meal, and she needs it for the breakfast cereal. S. Saldana stated all Meals on Wheels Program clients should be receiving milk with their meals unless they have requested not to receive the milk. S. Saldana will follow up with this concern.

S. Saldana reiterated Senior Programs’ staff has been focusing on the COVID-19 vaccine registrations and providing as much information as possible so that seniors can make an informed decision. Staff have also been working on the FY22 budget preparation, grant oversight, and the distribution of the congregate and home delivered meals. Senior Programs has concluded with the pet food grant. All grant funds were expended on pet food, pet supplies, pet grooming and pet vaccinations. She is hopeful that Senior Programs will continue to receive the pet food grant in the future.

X. CHAIR AND BOARD MEMBER UPDATES: Cheryl Young, Benavidez Recreation Center Representative, stated she and her husband stopped picking up meals at the Benavidez Center for several reasons. The quality of meals has declined significantly and the lack of interaction with other participants makes a big difference. One food item that they really enjoyed eating was the Enchiladas but after 2 or 3 times with the same issues, they opted not to pick up the meals. She explained one time when Green Enchiladas were being served her Enchiladas did not have any sauce. All she got on her plate was a fried tortilla with some cheese on it, and the tortilla was
very dry. It was hard to chew. She stated it seems as if the care is not there anymore. She has also seen some of the Meals on Wheels Program food and some of it is just not up to par. S. Saldana will follow up with Roger Bishop, Nutrition Program Manager.

Jo Ann Rodriguez-Haught, Frank O’ Brien Papen Center, stated she has noticed more seniors are picking up the meals at the Center. She commended the staff on the excellent job they are doing distributing the meals.

Sharlene Wittern, District 3 Representative, commented the portion size of the vegetables or the entree fluctuates. Sometimes the portion may be a quarter cup of vegetables or sometimes if there is meat in the entree it may be enough for two bites. The quality of the food is also different than when it was being served in the centers. The frozen foods are of a very poor quality. The meals contain high sodium content and more processed foods are being served. The food is just not up to par. S. Wittern stated the salad seems as if it was prepared at the beginning of week for the entire week. It does not look fresh. She has received numerous complaints from the participants stating that the spinach or the vegetables in the salad may already be in the rotting process. The participants have also complained to her that the portions are very small. S. Saldana will follow up.

C. De Young suggested using the dessert cup for the salads, because it is a larger serving. She also commented one day the fish was so badly burned and dry that it was inedible.

Dr. Abel Chavaria stated his mother is a recipient of the Meals on Wheels Program, but she has not complained about the food.

Chair J. Chavaria stated she has been in contact with seniors that attend the meals program. She stated it has been an emotional time for many seniors due to many losing loved ones to the COVID-19 virus. Once the centers reopen and participants begin to gather, it will be sad to know the number of seniors and family members who have passed away since the beginning of the pandemic. S. Saldana stated once the centers reopen, staff will plan to do a memorial at each of the centers to recognize/acknowledge the lives lost during the pandemic. The Board members agreed it was an excellent idea.

Dr. A. Chavaria inquired what kind of planning is taking place now in preparation for the reopening of the centers. He stated several restaurants are beginning to reopen, and he wanted to know the process or procedures that are in place to keep people safe when the senior centers reopen. S. Saldana stated Senior Programs has a reopening plan, but the State has not provided authorization or a tentative date as to when the senior centers can reopen to the public. According to the plan, the centers will reopen in phases and with a limited capacity. During the initial phase of the reopening, it will be at 25 percent with only the congregate meals being served in the centers. A schedule will be developed to allow for sanitizing of the facilities in the most frequented areas, like the lobby, dining halls, etc. S. Saldana stated once the centers reopen, it will be a lot different because it will be very structured to ensure there is enough time to sanitize the facilities. There will also be many activities taking place outdoors and activities that do not require people to be confined in the small classrooms.

Jessica Rivera, Community Outreach Representative with Presbyterian Health Plan, was introduced and welcomed. J. Rivera stated she wanted to inform seniors that have Medicare and
Medicaid that they have health care plan options available that offer more benefits. She explained Presbyterian Dual Plus is an HMO Special Needs Plan (SNP) with a Medicare contract with the New Mexico Human Services Department Medicaid program. S. Saldana stated Senior Programs does not endorse any one plan specifically. Senior Programs partners with the State of New Mexico Resource Center, Centers for Medicare/Medicaid, and Income Support Division to get the participants the services they qualify for or need. J. Rivera stated one of the health care plans left the market in December 2020, leaving many seniors scrambling to try to find a new plan. Due to the pandemic, it has been difficult to get that information out to the seniors that there are other options and they do not have to default to original Medicare. J. Rivera was thanked for the presentation.

S. Saldana announced Senior Programs will be distributing masks to all homebound and congregate meal program participants on Friday, February 12, 2021. If you know of anyone in the community who needs a mask, please reach out to Senior Programs’ staff.

The next Board meeting will be held virtually via Zoom on Thursday, March 11, 2021 from 9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.

XI. ADJOURNMENT: There was Board consensus to adjourn the meeting at 9:45 a.m.

Submitted,

[Signature]

Toni Flores, Recording Secretary