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MAY IS OLDER AMERICANS MONTH AGE STRONG! LIVE LONG!

Santa Fe- May is Older Americans Month—a tradition dating back to 1963 to honor the legacies and ongoing contributions of older Americans. The New Mexico Aging and Long-Term Services Department is joining communities nationwide in celebrating this month.

This year's Older Americans Month theme—*Age Strong! Live Long!*—recognizes the diversity and vitality of today's older Americans and New Mexicans. Although many of our elders have lived through hard times, they pioneered new technologies in medicine, communications, and industry while spearheading a cultural revolution that won equal rights for minorities, women, and disabled Americans.

These remarkable achievements demonstrate the strength and character of our elders, and underscore the debt of gratitude we owe to the generations that have given our society so much. But the contributions of older Americans and New Mexicans are not only in the past. Our elders are living longer and are more active than ever before. And with the aging of the baby boomer generation—the largest in our nation's history—New Mexico's senior population is expected to grow to 26% of the state's population by 2030. In 2002, New Mexico ranked 38th in the U.S. for the percent of adults 65+; it is estimated that the state will rank 4th by 2030.

Aging and Long-Term Services Department Secretary Michael Spanier indicated that, "the staggering growth in the number of older New Mexicans gives rise to an even greater need for individuals, communities and government to partner in offering services and assistance that support the dignity and independence of our elders."

While keeping the growing population of elders healthy and active will increase the demand for senior services. As the new generations of seniors become better educated and more financially secure than their predecessors, they are spending more time making significant contributions in their communities through civic and volunteer opportunities.

In fact, older citizens are a core component of service delivery to seniors—embodying and modeling the drive to *Age Strong! Live Long!* They volunteer at group meal sites and deliver food to homebound seniors; they provide transportation for older adults who cannot drive; they help seniors with home repair, shopping and errands; and they provide vital counseling, information and referral services. Their energy and commitment reminds all Americans—not just senior citizens and their caregivers—to do their part to enhance the quality of life for older generations.

The annual commemoration of Older Americans Month is our opportunity to recognize the contributions of older citizens and join them in providing services and support that empower the elderly. Americans of all ages and backgrounds can volunteer with programs that improve health literacy, increase access to quality health services, offer food and nutrition services, provide financial and housing counseling, sponsor social activities and community engagement, and more. Contact the New Mexico Aging and Disability Resource Center by calling 1-800-432-2080 or visit the New Mexico Social Service Resource Directory online: www.nmresourcedirectory.org to find out how you can volunteer to strengthen services for older New Mexicans, this month and all year round.

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