

Community Facilities
Rural Community Development Initiative Grant

USDA Teams with Project ECHO in the Fight Against COVID-19

USDA RD funding is used to educate rural first responders

Project ECHO (Extension for Community Healthcare Outcomes) began in 2003 with calls from physician's in rural New Mexico to the University of New Mexico Health Sciences Center seeking advice about patients they were treating.

The service has since grown into what is known today as the ECHO model, where TeleECHO sessions encompass various learning techniques and interactive video technology.

Today, more than 75 subjects are taught weekly to health care practitioners across New Mexico and other states.



When the Coronavirus hit, USDA granted permission to ECHO to expand its curriculum to address the pandemic. And on April 13, 2020, the "First Responder Resiliency TeleECHO Program" was launched.

In May 2020, the staff of Project ECHO welcomed, virtually, Dr. George Everly of Johns Hopkins University. He is an internationally recognized expert in disaster psychology and presented on the topic of Psychological First Aid during the COVID-19 pandemic. It was the latest in a series of weekly First Responder Resiliency TeleECHO sessions. The presentation was given to 180 first responders from across rural New Mexico and 32 other states.

First responder sessions like these were made possible in part by a \$250,000 USDA Rural Community Development Initiative (RCDI) Grant. Initially the sessions were designed to educate first responders on how to deal with opioid abuse and their own fatigue and burnout issues.

As the Coronavirus affected more rural areas in New Mexico, the definition of "First Responder" changed to include other medical personnel dealing with and treating the virus. Prior to COVID-19 about 30 to 50 first responders attended the weekly sessions. Today, the sessions have grown to include 90 to 300 attendees. One reason the numbers have grown is because the free sessions are virtual, and word has spread quickly about them.

To see the full presentations by [Dr. Everly](#) and [Dr. Johanna Katzman](#) or to see an [interview with Dr. Jeff Katzman from Project Echo](#), visit the Project Echo YouTube Channel.

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FACTS

Obligation Amount: \$250,000

Date of Obligation: September 17, 2019

Congressional District: Deb Haaland, (NM 01) Senator Tom Udall, Senator Martin Heinrich

Partners: None

Demographics: Targeted area is the rural communities of the State of New Mexico.

Because this is a virtual class rural first responders from other states are taking the classes.

Impact: The initial weekly education program helped first responders address the opioid crisis and then expanded to provide education to fight against COVID-19 in the rural areas of New Mexico and across the nation. Initially, there were about 50 first responders participating in the weekly educational series. But as the class began providing information on how to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic the program grew to an average of 90 to 300 first responders participating every week.

ECHO First Responder Resiliency Weblink: <https://echo.unm.edu/covid-19/sessions/firstresponder>

To register for an ECHO session, go to: FirstResponderECHO@salud.unm
