

## **New Mexico Immunization Coalition (NMIC) A Year Old and Growing Rapidly...**

In December 2002 a group of about 60 public and private providers, advocates, vaccine manufacturing representatives, and public health people met in Albuquerque to once again discuss the formation of a statewide immunization coalition for New Mexico. Led by national expert, Pat Bakalian, the group agreed that forming a coalition was critical and timely, given New Mexico's failing childhood immunization rates, according to the most recent national surveys.

Follow-up meetings were held in January and February with smaller committees meeting in between to learn about similar coalitions in other states and begin to chart the course for New Mexico. During this same time, as our newly elected Governor, Bill Richardson, was taking office and putting his executive team in place, the new Department of Health Secretary, Patricia Montoya, identified New Mexico's unacceptably low immunization rates as a priority for improvement. Word also got out that the new First Lady, Barbara Richardson, was keenly aware of the issue and wanted to add her voice and energy to the improvement efforts.

It was a great fit and in late March 2003 a key meeting was held in Santa Fe with Mrs. Richardson and about 45 members of the emerging coalition. The First Lady brought a proclamation declaring April as Immunization Awareness Month in New Mexico and things got rolling. The New Mexico Immunization Coalition was selected as the name, Mrs. Richardson agreed to be the Honorary Chairperson, Dr. Mark Whitaker and DOH staffer, Barak Wolff, became C-Chairs, and an initial Steering Committee was named. It was also agreed that there would be a major kick-off for the NMIC and the Done By One Campaign in April and that First Lady Rosalynn Carter and Betty Bumpers, co-founders of the national Every Child By Two advocacy organization would be invited.



Betty Bumpers, Rosalynn Carter, and Barbara Richardson meet with WIC staff and families at La Familia Medical Center in Santa Fe to discuss the importance of immunizations.

And so it was. On April 22 and 23, 2003 there were four major events featuring the trio of first ladies and an entourage of officials, staff, providers, kids, press, and of course, security officers. A full NMIC meeting of almost 100 people was held at the Albuquerque Museum featuring a fine buffet lunch and presentations in the auditorium. Press coverage was extensive and the NMIC was off and running.

Between May and July the NMIC Steering Committee met on several occasions, including a lovely meeting at the Governor's Mansion, to develop its vision, mission, goal, and strategic objectives. At the same time, the First Lady teamed up with Dr. Phil Eaton, Vice-President of the Health Sciences Center at UNM, and matching funding was committed to hire an Executive Director for the NMIC and provide operating funds for the first few years. It was decided that the NMIC would be based out of Dr. Eaton's office, but would function as a statewide resource in a reasonably independent and entrepreneurial manner, with the NMIC Steering Committee (link to listing) setting much of the direction.

The activity level and high visibility continued with a press conference in early August and an immunization event at the State Fair in September. By October, Anna Levy was hired as the NMIC Executive Director and the Steering Committee started planning for the NMIC Annual Meeting on December 5, 2003, at the Hispanic Cultural Center—exactly one year from the initial meeting and in the same venue. It was a fine celebration with awards, celebrations and some serious small group work to develop the priorities and work plan for 2004.



Dr. Phil Eaton, Secretary Montoya and First Lady Barbara Richardson share a few moments at the First Annual Meeting of the NMIC.