



What's Inside:

Governor's Constituent Day	2
NCCI Rate Reduction	2
WCA All Hands Event	3
NCCI Reports Available	4
Calendar	4

MEETING NOTICE:

The Advisory Council on Workers' Compensation and Occupational Disease Disablement plans to meet in January, date and location TBD. Check the WCA website for meeting notice at: <https://www.workerscomp.nm.gov/advisory-council>.

Loretta Lopez Named Director of Workers' Compensation Administration

By Aileen O'Catherine

Loretta Lopez became director of the New Mexico Workers' Compensation Administration (WCA) following her appointment by Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham, and officially started on Oct. 20, 2019. Lopez most recently served as Deputy Director for the state's General Services Department (GSD), where she oversaw the Risk Management and Health Benefits Division. Lopez has 30 years of legal experience and a background in nursing. She is the first woman to be appointed director of the agency.

Lopez earned a bachelor's degree in nursing from the University of New Mexico (UNM) in 1982, and a law degree, also from UNM, in 1989. She was a nurse in the pediatric intensive care unit at UNM's Children's Hospital, caring for patients in the peri- and post-operative setting, as well as supervising nurses and orderlies. She also taught nursing at Central New Mexico Community College.

As an attorney, Lopez served as a Metropolitan Court judge from 2003 to 2006. She has been a domestic relations/violence hearing officer in New Mexico's First and Second Judicial District Courts, and was an administrative staff attorney as well as a settlement facilitator for the Second Judicial District Court. Lopez has also served as an assistant district attorney for Bernalillo County. As a solo practitioner, her work focused on family law and criminal defense. She was also a contract attorney for the Community Justice for Survivors of Sexual Violence Project.

In her most recent position as Deputy Director at the GSD, Lopez said she learned a lot about workers' compensation. While there, she drafted and reviewed contracts and oversaw requests for proposals (RFPs) for health care services. She mediated and participated in



WCA Director Loretta Lopez

cases. Her cumulative experiences in court administration, mediation, management of case loads, work as a settlement facilitator, in addition to her medical background, and other services provide a sound base for the kind of work done at the WCA.

Lopez would like to learn more about the agency's needs and challenges before creating any definitive goals, but she does hope to bring new technology into agency processes in order to help manage data more effectively. "My vision is to make processes more streamlined and improve upon what we have," she said.

Lopez looks forward to the opportunity to serve as WCA director. A top agenda item will be to talk with and get to know staff members, evaluate their challenges and gather their ideas for the agency. She appreciates the hard work of the agency's employees. She also looks forward to talking and working with members of the work comp community.

She takes over the position formerly held by Acting Director Verily Jones, who assumed the role when Darin Childers stepped down as director in December, 2018. Jones has resumed her position as the agency's Deputy Director of Operations.

WCA Participates in Governor's Constituent Day Event

The New Mexico Workers' Compensation Administration joined Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham and other state agencies on Saturday, August 10 for a Governor's Constituent Day. The "Cabinet in Your Community" event was open to the public to help with any needs or questions they might have. Representatives from the WCA were on hand to answer general workers' compensation questions from workers and employers and to assist constituents in completing forms.

WCA Public Information Officer Diana Sandoval-Tapia stressed the importance of being available to the public. "Bringing our agency's services to the public at these kinds of events is a win-win," she said. "Our agency representatives can answer questions, clarify information, and dispel misconceptions. Plus, it's always good to connect with constituents face to face." Sandoval-Tapia reported there was a good turnout at the event.



WCA staff, l to r: Richard Villafuerte, Lucy Solimon, Verily Jones, Diana Sandoval-Tapia, Gov. Lujan Grisham, Peggy Tafoya, Heather Jordan, Leslie Torrez

Along with Sandoval-Tapia, Acting Director Verily Jones was in attendance, as were ombudsmen, constituent service staff and some from management.

Other participating agencies included the Department of Health, the Motor Vehicle Division, and the Human Services Department. A variety of services were available, to include assistance with federal programs such as Medicaid and SNAP (Supplemental

Nutrition Assistance Program), free immunizations, and vehicle registration. The event took place from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the Carpenters Local 1319 Union Hall. The second Governor's Constituent Day was held Saturday, Nov. 2 at the Roswell campus of Eastern New Mexico University, and the WCA's Roswell field office staff were available to assist the public.

NM Workers' Comp. Adm. Quarterly Bulletin

Loretta Lopez, Director
Diana Sandoval-Tapia, Public Information Officer
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The Bulletin is electronically published in January, April, July and October by the Public Information Office of the New Mexico Workers' Compensation Administration. The Bulletin is available free of charge. Send changes of e-mail address and requests to receive the Bulletin to Diana Sandoval-Tapia in the Public Information Office, New Mexico Workers' Compensation Administration, diana.sandoval@state.nm.us. Suggestions for articles are welcome. Call Diana Sandoval-Tapia at (505) 841-6052. Recent issues of the Quarterly Bulletin can be viewed on the Internet at <https://workerscomp.nm.gov/NMWCA-Publications>.

NCCI Recommends Rate Reduction in New Mexico

The National Council on Compensation Insurance (NCCI) has proposed an overall average 8.5 percent decrease in the workers' compensation voluntary market, to become effective January 1, 2020. The components of the voluntary loss cost filing include a decrease of 8.8 percent in experience and trend change; an increase of 0.4 percent in benefit change; and a loss-based expense change of -0.15, for a loss cost level change of -8.5 percent.

The filing is based on premium and loss experience for policy years 2015, 2016 and 2017. New Mexico's frequency of lost-time claims continues to decline. After adjusting to a common wage level, both indemnity and medical average cost per case figures remain relatively flat.

Other notable changes proposed in the filing include a modification to the swing limit bound calculation and a change to the defense and cost containment expense provision calculation.

NCCI uses widely accepted ratemaking methodologies to determine its proposed overall average loss cost level changes.

What is the Advisory Council?

The Advisory Council on Workers' Compensation and Occupational Disease Disablement is a task force created by statute, comprised of six members, three representing workers and three representing employers. The primary role of the Council is to advise the governor and legislature on the status of the workers' compensation system in New Mexico. The Advisory Council is required to meet at least twice annually. Scheduled meetings of the Council are announced on the WCA website, <https://www.workerscomp.nm.gov/Advisory-Council>.

NMWCA Employee and Bureau of the Year Announced at Agency's Annual "All Hands" Event

By Aileen O'Catherine

The New Mexico Workers' Compensation Administration (WCA) held its annual "All Hands" staff development and employee recognition event on September 26, 2019. Staff from the agency's six field offices traveled to Albuquerque for the event.

WCA Acting Director Verily Jones announced that Financial Specialist Jeremy Carrillo was selected to receive the agency's "Employee of the Year" award. Carrillo has been with the agency for one year. In presenting the award, Jones said that Carrillo has played a crucial role over the past year, because he stepped in to help twice when the chief financial officer left the agency. "Jeremy is always willing to help and take on any challenge presented to him. Without him, the daily functions of the agency would grind to a halt," she said. Jones lauded Carrillo for ensuring important tasks such as payroll got done.

The Enforcement Bureau was named the 2019 "Bureau of the Year." In presenting the award, Acting

Director Jones said the bureau's staff in 2019 had increased outreach efforts within the workers' compensation community, which resulted in an increase in the number of referrals. The increased workload has required another full-time employee be added to the bureau. Administrative penalties assessed against offenders is on track to be the highest amount collected in years.

A new award was included in this year's lineup, the Lifetime Achievement Award, presented to two long-time WCA staffers. Richard Crollett, an attorney with the Uninsured Employers' Bureau, was presented the award by Jones. Crollett has been with the agency for 22 years, and has been with the



Acting Director Verily Jones with Employee of the Year Jeremy Carrillo

UEF since its inception in June, 2003. "Richard getting the award is richly deserved," said his supervisor, Mark Plomer. "He provides good counsel for our group, and his commitment to the agency is unquestionable. He is also a great resource for others at the agency." Prior to his employment at the WCA, Crollett was in private practice for 25 years, specializing in workers' compensation.

Sharron Johncox also received a Lifetime Achievement Award. Johncox will be with the agency 30 years in December 2019, having started as the office manager in the Lovington field office in 1989. Lovington was the agency's first field office. She oversaw the office's move to Hobbs in 2017. "Sharron is a dedicated professional who cares deeply about the agency," said Field Programs Manager Peggy Tafoya, Johncox's supervisor. "She goes out of her way to help in any way she can both those within the agency and those without."

The WCA also recognized several of its staff members for their years of service to the agency. Service award recipients include Brenda Henderson, 20 years; Sarah Castro and Diana



Enforcement Bureau staff (l to r) Israel Chavez, Frank Oliveira, Yvette Aguirre, Bureau Chief Lucy Solimon, Acting Director Verily Jones

Continued on page 4

WCA “All Hands” Event, cont’d.

Continued from page 3

Sandoval-Tapia, 15 years; and Richard Bustamante, Kellee Gaddis, Mark Plomer and Ruili Yan, five years.

The theme of this year’s event was “Team Building.” The day began with a variety of team competition activities, where teams participated in events. Employees came together on teams with coworkers they don’t normally work with on a daily basis. A scavenger hunt had employees learn about the

achievements of fellow employees.

The agency then heard three presentations. Pam Coleman, Director of the New Mexico State Personnel Office, spoke on the Governor’s Code of Conduct, and how it should be modeled by state employees. WCA Human Resources Manager Catherine Farrell gave a presentation on frequently asked questions about WCA policies. The agency also invited Marianne Bjelke

to speak about communicating across generations. Her expertise includes executive coaching, team building, and effective interpersonal communications.

“I really feel that the positive energy and camaraderie that resulted from this year’s “All Hands” event will propel staff moving forward,” said then Acting Director Jones.

NCCI Reports Available

The National Council on Compensation Insurance (NCCI) has published two reports of special interest to New Mexicans. Their Medical Data Report for the State of New Mexico provides information on medical benefit costs by category. The report also provides details on prescription drugs.

The NCCI Supplement on Opioid Utilization is also available for review. Find both publications on the WCA website on its Communications page.

<https://workerscomp.nm.gov/Communications>



HOLIDAY CLOSURE

All Workers’ Compensation offices will be closed on the following upcoming holidays:

Veterans Day, Monday, November 11

Thanksgiving, Thursday - Friday, November 28 - 29

Christmas, Wednesday, December 25

New Year’s, Wednesday, January 1, 2020

MLK Day, Monday, January 20, 2020

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WCA Website:

<https://workerscomp.nm.gov>