

## New Mexico Behavioral Health Institute's Forensic Treatment Center on Track for 2028 completion

By Joe Vigil, public information officer, General Services Department

Construction of the New Mexico Behavioral Health Institute (NMBHI) Forensic Treatment Center is moving forward on schedule, with state officials confirming the \$218 million project is fully funded and on track for completion by November 2028.



“The facility will provide 90 licensed beds, including 80 standard beds and ten high-acuity beds, significantly expanding the state’s capacity to treat forensic behavioral health patients,” said Tim Shields, executive director / hospital administrator, NMBHI.

“The project is being delivered in three phases, a strategy designed to maintain steady progress while managing funding timelines and construction complexity,” said Anna Silva, cabinet secretary for the General Services Department.

Phase I, supported by a \$103 million appropriation in fiscal year 2025, focuses on completing the building’s structural shell, with an anticipated completion date of December 2026. Phase II, funded with \$40 million in fiscal year 2026, will add two attached housing units with four wings each and a targeted completion of October 2027. The final phase, backed by \$75 million in fiscal year 2027, will include interior build-out, furniture, fixtures, equipment installation, and landscaping.

One of the most critical early challenges involved constructing the facility’s masonry structure. The

phased funding approach required early coordination with trades partners who will not begin on-site work until later stages. Contractors were brought into the design process early to review plans and shop drawings, ensuring that critical infrastructure embedded in the structure today will align with systems installed in later phases.

"Unlike framed buildings, masonry requires precise planning and design because rough ins for systems such as plumbing, electrical, and structural reinforcements must be installed before walls are filled and sealed with grout," said Sam Burns, general superintendent, Jaynes Corporation. "You only get one chance to get it right, so the importance of coordinating every detail - from rebar placement to utility conduits - before construction began was critical."



Site conditions also presented significant hurdles. Crews managed extensive earthwork, including 16-foot soil fills that required careful testing and placement. Unusually heavy rainfall, nearly three feet in the last year, complicated efforts further, particularly when groundwater was encountered during the massive retaining wall construction. Engineers were brought in to reassess designs and ensure long-term stability, while crews adapted by drying materials before reuse, rather than the typical New Mexico high desert practice of adding moisture.

Another sensitive issue emerged at Creston Hill where construction crews encountered unmarked archaeological findings dating back to the late 1800's. Archaeologists were brought in early and worked alongside construction teams to document and preserve findings. The area has since been stabilized and will remain protected with plans to fence it off after construction is complete to ensure its preservation for future generations.

"Despite these challenges, inspections and quality control measures have been strong throughout," said Tim Sedillo, project manager for GSD's Facilities Management Division.

“Additional testing protocols have been implemented due to the scale of the project, particularly for soil, concrete, and grout work, to ensure long-term durability and safety.”

Currently, about 80 workers are on-site, including approximately 40 masons. That number is expected to grow to around 200 as construction progresses. Notably, about 90 percent of contractors and employees are from New Mexico, underscoring the project’s local economic impact.



Silva emphasized that substantial completion will not immediately mean occupancy. Due to the facility’s specialized security and operational requirements, extensive training and system testing will be required before patients are admitted, with full occupancy expected in 2029.

Designed as an all-electric facility with future solar capability and possible expansion in mind, the new forensic treatment center represents a long-term investment in New Mexico’s behavioral health infrastructure.