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The Health & Human Services Secretaries Tour the State to Hear from New Mexicans

Santa Fe, April 21, 2003 – The leaders of four key state departments will take to the road beginning in May to learn more about what needs exist for Medicaid recipients, parents of children with behavioral disorders, seniors, people with disabilities and others.

The Secretaries of Human Services, Health, Children, Youth & Families, the Secretary-designate for the Aging and Long-term Care Department and Lt. Governor Diane Denish will tour the State of New Mexico from May through August to conduct public town hall meetings to discuss four health and human services initiatives: A statewide comprehensive health plan, behavioral health plan for children, long-term care plan for seniors & disabled individuals, and Medicaid system redesign.

“With the legislative session behind us, the real work of implementing the program changes begins,” said Human Services Department (HSD) Secretary Pam Hyde. “And we want the people of New Mexico to play a big role in how the changes occur,” Hyde added. “New Mexico has the second lowest rate of health insurance coverage in the nation, and the governor has given us a big challenge, to find a way and insure all New Mexicans,”

“The state needs a comprehensive healthcare plan that will act as a guide to develop quality healthcare and improve access to medical services for all its citizens,” said Department of Health (DOH) Secretary Patricia Montoya. “By going from city to city, listening to the people of New Mexico, we hope to come up with ideas in fulfilling that goal,” Montoya added.

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HHS Secretaries Tour New Mexico....add 1

New Mexico has the highest child poverty rate in the nation. “We need to identify families where a risk of abuse, violence or youth delinquency exists to prevent a crisis situation from occurring and keeping families strong,” said Children, Youth, and Families (CYFD) Secretary Mary-Dale Bolson. “A critical step in developing programs and services for children and families includes listening and responding to the concerns of citizens within local communities statewide. There is much to be accomplished, and CYFD is committed to building partnerships in local communities,” Bolson added.

Last fiscal year, the state spent \$326.8 million on Medicaid services for low-income and disabled seniors, and its expected this year that figure will increase by almost \$10 million. The senior population in New Mexico will almost double by 2020, so finding a means of providing home and community-based programs that allow seniors to stay in their home is an even greater priority. “Our desire is to create a continuum of home and community-based services that meet individuals’ needs and maximize their independence so they can live life on their own terms in their community,” said Michelle Lujan-Grisham, Secretary-designate of the Adult and Long-term Care Department.

When it comes to Medicaid in general, New Mexico is one of a handful of states not forced to make cuts to the program. “However, with the growth of Medicaid at nearly 10-percent a year we need to find a way to redesign the system to save money without eliminating people from the programs,” said HSD Secretary Hyde.

“As chair of the Children’s Cabinet, I believe this tour will serve the important goal of improving communication between government and the citizens with regard to services for New Mexico’s most precious resource—its children,” said Lt. Governor Diane D. Denish. “I’m looking forward to traveling the state and showing people that state government is working to tackle the weighty problem of health care in New Mexico,” Denish added.

The first stop on the spring & summer tour is May 7th in Albuquerque, with the specific topics of health care & uninsured. The meeting begins at 8:30 a.m., and ends at 12:30 p.m. at the TVI Workforce Center, 5600 Eagle Rock Ave, NE.

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