



Governor Bill Richardson Receives Recommendations From *Insure New Mexico!* Council

Diverse, non-partisan council studied ways to reduce high number of New Mexicans without health insurance

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SANTA FE- Governor Bill Richardson announced today that his *Insure New Mexico!* Council has delivered proposals intended to reduce the number of New Mexicans without health insurance. The council's 34 recommendations were contained in a summary report presented during a news conference at the State Capitol.

"Today we move one step close toward my goal of offering health insurance to the 414,000 New Mexicans who lack it, and access to affordable, quality healthcare," Governor Richardson said.

The Governor created the council last September, and directed the members to find ways to decrease the number of uninsured New Mexicans and increase the number of employers offering health insurance.

The *Insure New Mexico!* Council was chaired by Lieutenant Governor Denish, with assistance from New Mexico Secretary of Human Services Pamela Hyde. Council members included representatives from all the major health insurance companies doing business in New Mexico, small business employers and employees, non-profit organizations, unions, and legislators. The group worked alongside experts from the Health Insurance Alliance, the Insurance Division, the Human Services Department, the General Services Department, and the Health Policy Commission.

"It is significant that these diverse companies, agencies, and organizations have come together, each bringing something to the table, with the specific goal of giving more New Mexicans access to affordable employer-sponsored insurance and quality healthcare," said the Governor. "I will study each of these recommendations carefully, before finalizing the plan that I will present to the legislature and to the people of New Mexico."

The Governor highlighted several aspects of the report, including the council's focus on expanding health insurance for low income Native American and Hispanic families with children, a proposal that small employers be allowed to buy-in to the General Services Department's health insurance program, and a recommendation to expand the role of the Health Insurance Alliance by revising the current rate structure to reflect actual market conditions.

The Governor also cited the council's recommendations for tax credits for employers who offer insurance to part-time employees, and a proposed graduated tax credit for employers who have not previously offered health insurance.

Lieutenant Governor Denish noted the council discussed nearly 100 separate ideas. The Lt. Governor listed several key recommendations, including the implementation of the State Coverage Initiative, and utilizing Medicaid to reach more low-income adults and families with children. Both plans would use state funds to leverage millions of dollars in federal matching funds.

The Lieutenant Governor revealed that other recommendations would require insurers to offer health insurance to part-time employees working 20 hours or more per week, and offer domestic partner coverage to any size employer who wants to provide it.

The council also recommended ways to help fund the new initiatives, including closing the tax loophole for smokeless tobacco products and increasing the liquor excise tax.

Secretary of Human Services Pamela Hyde says the committee had access to research that provided insight into the reasons for the state's high rate of uninsured. "We knew the number of uninsured, the research offered a more detailed analysis of exactly who lacks insurance, and some of the underlying reasons why," said Secretary Hyde.

Secretary Hyde said the research revealed that 65% of New Mexicans living below 185% of the federal poverty level are uninsured, 28% of the uninsured are Native American, and 23% are Hispanic. The studies also show that 62% of New Mexicans between the ages of 18-34 are uninsured, and the council discussed opportunities to educate young people and convince them of the importance of having health insurance.

Governor Richardson emphasized that finding a realistic, responsible solution will require significant change. "I will direct state agencies to give, when appropriate, preference to vendors, suppliers, and contractors that offer health insurance to their employees, and I challenge New Mexico businesses that already offer employee insurance to do the same."

Insure New Mexico! Is part of the Governor's "Building a Healthy New Mexico" initiative- a comprehensive set of health, education, and human services programs the Governor introduced in September and October of this year.