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For Immediate Release

Barriers to Obtaining Health Insurance Among Native Americans – Results of Study Released

Governor Bill Richardson’s *Insure New Mexico!* Initiatives Can Help Improve Uninsured Rate Among American Indians

Santa Fe, February 7, 2006 – An in-depth qualitative analysis exploring the health care needs of Native Americans details reasons Native Americans do not purchase health insurance. “The reasons range from “cost” to “trust”, while at the same time the study finds health insurance is very valuable to Native Americans in New Mexico,” said Pamela Hyde, Human Services Department Secretary and member of Governor Bill Richardson’s *Insure New Mexico!* Council.

Barriers to Obtaining Health Insurance Among Native Americans in New Mexico, is the first study of its kind in the nation. The study was commissioned by the Human Services Department (HSD) in an effort to find out why Native Americans are disproportionately uninsured in New Mexico.

“While we know that 28% of Native Americans do not have health care coverage, compared to 11% of non-Hispanic Whites, we wanted to know why, in order for the *Insure New Mexico!* Council to find initiatives to help improve health care coverage for Native Americans,” said Hyde.

The study found that Native Americans consider health insurance to be important for several reasons, including that it provides access to high quality health care; promotes peace of mind; provides security and protection; provides coverage for services not available through the Indian Health Service (IHS) or on an emergency basis; provides access to specialized plans such as dental or vision; and serves as a safety net in addition to IHS.

However, participants in the study cited many financial, logistical and cultural reasons why enrollment rates are not higher among Native Americans in New Mexico. They

include: high cost, feeling that health care coverage for Native Americans is the responsibility of the federal government through the Indian Health Service, cultural barriers, lack of trust, healthy young people do not see the need to spend the money for coverage, the complexity of bureaucratic process, lack of understanding the process, and lack of education and outreach by insurance companies.

“For example, Native Americans feel that the Indian Health Service (IHS) or the federal government is responsible for their health care. However, it is important to note that the IHS is not an insurance plan and if that is the only coverage people have they are considered to be uninsured,” said Hyde.

There are several HSD and *Insure New Mexico!* initiatives either currently underway or awaiting legislative approval during this session aimed at improving the uninsured rate among Native Americans. They include an aggressive Medicaid outreach campaign among Native American communities, changing Medicaid recertification to 12 months and creating a Medical and Premium Assistance Program that will insure children in families who do not qualify for Medicaid.

“There are 21,000 children ages zero to five that are uninsured in our state,” said Carolyn Ingram, Medical Assistance Division Director. “However, 16,000 of those children qualify for Medicaid but are simply not enrolled; many of those children are Native American. We are working very hard to reach those children and get them the health care coverage they deserve,” said Ingram.

Research and Polling Inc. of Albuquerque conducted the study during the fall of 2005. The data was collected from eight focus groups statewide, including: Albuquerque urban Indians, Gallup employers, Gallup ‘out of traditional’ workforce, Shiprock employees, Southern Pueblo members, Mescalero Apache Tribal members, Santa Fe employers, and members of Northern Pueblos.

Barriers to Obtaining Health Insurance Among Native Americans in New Mexico can be found on the Insure New Mexico! website at www.insurenewmexico.state.nm.us.

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