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## **New Mexico Moves Toward Universal Health Coverage**

**Health Coverage for New Mexicans Committee Identifies Models that will Provide Coverage for New Mexicans**

*Santa Fe, New Mexico, January 31, 2007* – The Health Coverage for New Mexicans Committee (Committee) Chaired by Lt. Governor Diane Denish and appointed by Governor Bill Richardson and the Legislative leadership last July has identified three health care models that will move New Mexico toward universal health coverage. “These models and the financial analysis of them will guide the recommendations to the Governor and the Legislature to get every New Mexican the health care coverage they deserve,” said Lieutenant Governor Denish. “Our aim is systemic reform toward universal health coverage.”

Last month, an agreement was reached on behalf of the Committee, between the state and Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. (Mathematica), to conduct an extensive quantitative and comparative analysis of three health coverage models to bring universal health coverage to New Mexico, which will be presented over the summer for consideration for *next year's* 2008 Legislative session.

Over the past four years, the state has increased access to affordable health care solutions for New Mexico's small employers through the *Insure New Mexico!* initiatives. “This next step is moving from an incremental to a comprehensive approach. The Committee is taking reasonable and measured steps to ensure transparency in the process and a responsible analysis,” said Denish.

The analysis will consider the costs to employers, the state, individuals and families, and health care companies compared to taking no action with the current system. “Before we proceed on recommending and ultimately adopting a model, we need to understand the ultimate benefits of bringing health care reform to New Mexicans. Cost alone however, will not be the determining factor for any final model proposed and adopted by the Committee,” said Denish.

The three models chosen take different approaches to providing a comprehensive or universal approach to provide health insurance or coverage for New Mexicans. The models are:

1. The Health Security Act, which is a single, statewide health care plan, in which all residents who have lived in New Mexico for a year or more would have benefits mirroring those of state employees. The plan's spokesperson calls it a “homegrown, homespun, New Mexico plan,” operating as a citizens' co-op involving the use of public and private funds. This is a single plan administered by a commission appointed by the Governor.

2. The New Mexico Health Choices Plan, which would give New Mexicans a range of private and government options to obtain affordable health insurance. This market-based model is based on government-subsidized vouchers provided to individuals.
3. The New Mexico Health Coverage Plan, which is also a market-based universal-coverage plan that would preserve roles for both the current public and private health care system in the state, and includes a requirement that everyone have insurance including a clear role for employers. It would include an expansion of Medicaid and incentives for employers to provide health insurance for workers.

The 23-member Committee and four advisors appointed by the Governor and the Legislative leadership represents selected these models from several presented to them.

The Committee is one point in Governor Bill Richardson's Five Point Plan to close the uninsured gap. "The Governor has put an aggressive plan in place cover all New Mexicans, and agrees with the principles set forth by the Committee that universal health coverage is a realistic opportunity for all people living in New Mexico to purchase or be provided with public or private health care coverage," said Secretary Pamela Hyde, Human Services Department and member of the Committee.

Next steps of the Health Coverage for New Mexicans Committee are:

- **April 2007** – Preliminary report from Mathematica on cost analysis of three health care models;
- **June 2007** – Final report and presentation from Mathematica and Committee's recommendations on next steps;
- **July – November 2007** – Mathematica report and Committee recommendations considered and discussed by Interim Legislative committees, Executive and stakeholders; and,
- **January – February 2008** - Committee legislation introduced in the 2008 New Mexico State Legislature.

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