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**For Immediate Release**

## **Telehealth Services Now Available for Medicaid Recipients**

*Santa Fe, September 5, 2007* – Secretary Pam Hyde of New Mexico’s Human Services Department (HSD) announced a new benefit for Medicaid clients: Telehealth services. “Providing telehealth services and reimbursing providers for these services means more New Mexicans living in rural communities will have the opportunity to visit with a physician or behavioral health counselor and save a long distant trip to Albuquerque, Las Cruces or Santa Fe,” said Pamela Hyde, HSD Secretary.

Telehealth is the use of computer technology connected by high-speed, broadband communication to access health care providers, communicate diagnostic information and connect providers with each other as well as patients. It includes videoconferencing, the Internet and store-and-forward imaging.

Telehealth became a Medicaid covered service in August after receiving public input during town hall meetings held across the state last year. “The need for more health care providers, especially specialists, was a common theme during the public meetings,” said Hyde. “Now Medicaid will pay for services via telehealth the same as if they were face-to-face services,” said Hyde.

Physicians may be with their patient when using telehealth. For example: A pregnant woman living in Catron County wants a midwife living in Silver City to deliver her baby. As the time of birth nears, the soon-to-be mother and her primary care physician living in Luna, NM (Catron County) would be able to use telehealth to discuss pre-delivery options with the Silver City midwife.

Of the 417,000 New Mexicans receiving health coverage through Medicaid, more than half live in rural New Mexico communities “We know that telehealth will greatly benefit adults and children living in rural areas that require mental health services, Diabetes treatment and for prenatal services prior to the actual delivery of babies,” said Carolyn Ingram, HSD Medical Assistance Division Director. “Telehealth is one more tool for us to use to help close the gap in access to health care services among New Mexicans.”

In 2005, Governor Bill Richardson created the Telehealth and Health Information Technology Commission. The commission’s charge was to figure out ways to use new and existing technology to move data, information and patient care across New Mexico’s large geographic areas.

“New Mexico Medicaid has begun one of the nation’s most comprehensive reimbursement programs for telehealth services and provides a model for the country,” said Dr. Dale Alverson, Medical Director of the Center for Telehealth at the University of New Mexico. “The Human Services Department recognizes the value of using telehealth to enhance access to covered

services for its clients, and now eligible providers using telehealth will be reimbursed at the same rate as a physical face-to-face encounter.”

Many school districts and public health centers located in rural parts of the state are already equipped with telehealth capabilities. Medicaid providers who have a computer can purchase basic web-based equipment at a minimum cost to provide telehealth services for their clients.

“The patient receiving the telehealth services can be located at a variety of originating sites, including their place of residence,” said Alverson. “This new benefit is a major step forward in facilitating the use of telehealth in New Mexico, aimed at enhancing the health and wellness of its citizens, particularly the underserved.”

Providers may access more information about the Medicaid telehealth services at [http://www.hsd.state.nm.us/mad/pdf\\_files/Registers/FR\\_30\\_20\\_TH\\_2007.pdf](http://www.hsd.state.nm.us/mad/pdf_files/Registers/FR_30_20_TH_2007.pdf).

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