



State of New Mexico

Office of the Governor

Bill Richardson
Governor

For immediate release
Contact: Gilbert Gallegos
1/16/04
505.476.2217

Governor Bill Richardson outlines Health Care Agenda

SANTA FE - Governor Bill Richardson outlined his Health Care Agenda, which will be introduced during the upcoming legislative session that starts Tuesday.

The Governor delivered the following remarks during a news conference today:

For far too long, New Mexico has taken a band-aid approach to health care. New Mexico has lacked a comprehensive plan - and the political will - to address the long list of health issues that have kept this state from moving forward.

And the list is long. For example,

- We have been last in the number of uninsured children
- We have been last in the number of immunized children
- And we have been among the top states in number of residents with diabetes, hypertension and other chronic diseases.

Starting next week, when the legislative session begins, I will lead the charge to develop a bold plan to improve health care coverage and access for all New Mexicans.

I'm ready to make the tough decisions that are required to assert control over a system plagued by limited resources, booming demand, skyrocketing costs and a growing shortage of qualified health care professionals, particularly in rural areas.

I also want to place more emphasis on accountability and fiscal responsibility. I want a coordinated approach to make the most of limited state and federal dollars for health care.

We will take immediate steps to accomplish these goals through my Health Care Agenda. That agenda includes four bills that we will introduce next week with the help of Senator Dede Feldman and House Majority Leader Danice Picraux, who will play key roles during the session.

Here's what I'm proposing:

1. A Health Care Purchasing Authority for existing public employee and retiree health care. We can immediately save 2-million dollars - possibly a lot more -- in administrative costs by taking this approach. I will also propose a related memorial directing an analysis to determine the impact of allowing private employers, individuals and families to buy into the purchasing authority;
2. A Comprehensive Statewide Health Plan -basically a foundation for policy decisions dealing with access to health care, workforce issues and financing concerns.
3. A unified Behavioral Health Plan that better serves the mental health and substance abuse needs of New Mexicans.
4. Give the Department of Health oversight of hospitals and nursing facilities. I want to ensure that decisions about opening or closing these facilities do not adversely impact access to health care.

Last Fall I appointed the bipartisan Health Care Coverage and Access Task Force and Steering Committee that worked long and hard hours discussing the future of health care in New Mexico and how to improve it.

My Health Care Agenda is consistent with the Steering Committee Report, and has been endorsed by the Health and Human Services Committee.

These are just first steps, but significant ones. We must act now. Health care is a shared responsibility. We all - state government, employers and individuals and families - must make the tough decisions necessary to move New Mexico forward, and improve health care coverage and access.

I urge the Legislature to act quickly on these proposals.

I have asked my Human Services Secretary Hyde to take the lead on two proposals -- the Health Care Purchasing Authority and the Interdepartmental Behavioral Health Purchasing Collaborative. My Health Secretary Pat Montoya is in charge of the Statewide Strategic Health Plan and creating an oversight mechanism for hospitals and nursing homes.