



For Immediate Release
October 29, 2007

Contact: Allan Oliver
Office (505) 476-2214

Governor Richardson Rolls Out Plan to Enhance Health Care Workforce

Initiatives Seek to Increase Number of Physicians, Dentists, Nurses in State

(Santa Fe, NM) – During his universal coverage rollout on October 25, Governor Bill Richardson outlined a series of funding initiatives to improve New Mexico’s health care work force, particularly in border and rural counties.

“Border and rural counties- have a real and constant need for providers, yet our state is consistently challenged to keep the physicians, dentists and nurses we train in state,” said Governor Richardson. “By doubling the funding, we will help health professionals stay in our state, and meet our current and growing needs. I’m confident that this investment will pay long-term dividends for the health of our state.”

Currently, the state of New Mexico only retains about 20% of the approximately 550 residents currently being trained at the University of New Mexico Health Sciences Center. Most residents accrue significant student loans and often choose to work in states with higher wages in order to pay off debts. In addition, it is difficult to recruit physicians to if loan payment awards are not competitive.

“Governor Richardson’s initiative to increase funding and participation in the various health professional loan obligation programs offers New Mexico’s best opportunity in decades to address the shortage and mal-distribution of physicians, dentists, and others, especially in border and frontier areas of the state,” said Jerry N. Harrison, PhD, Executive Director, New Mexico Health Resources. “The plan is unique in the nation for including the full breadth of health professionals, and strengthens our ability to retain those who receive their health educations here.

The Governor’s plan will make it possible for more New Mexico trained health professionals to start their careers or continue them in-state and to offer their services to patients everywhere in the state.”

The Enhanced Health Care Workforce Initiative will:

1. Expand Health Professional Loan Repayment Program: creating 40 new awards for physicians and dentists and increasing award amounts from \$12,500 to

- 25,000. With some physicians graduating with loan indebtedness in excess of \$150,000, this program provides significant incentives for recruitment to underserved parts of New Mexico.
2. Expand the Medical Student Loan for Service Program: creating 10 new awards and increasing awards from \$12,000 to \$25,000.
 3. Expand the Health Service Corps: adding 10 new awards and increasing awards to \$30,000 per year. The Health Service Corps provides stipends to health professionals during their clinical training in exchange for a commitment to work in underserved areas. The program also provides financial support to primary care centers and other health safety net agencies in underserved areas to assist in the recruitment and retention of health professionals. This program has doubled in size and scope under the current Administration, with its expansion to include dentists and dental hygienists.
 4. Increase the number of dental students supported under Western Interstate Commission on Higher Education (WICHE) Programs and adding five new dental awards at \$21,300 per student. New Mexico sent 51 students to out-of-state programs this year in five different fields (dentistry, veterinary medicine, optometry, osteopathic medicine, and library studies). Historically, more than 60 percent of students have returned to New Mexico to pursue their professional careers.
 5. Pay the \$400 application fee required by the Medical Board for physician residents at UNM-HSC (and other states if funding allows) who choose New Mexico as their first state of licensure.
 6. Fund nursing faculty to obtain higher degree levels.

The total cost of these initiatives is approximately \$1.84 million and will be included in the Executive Budget Recommendation for the 2008 Legislative Session. Funds are attached to the Departments of Higher Education, Department of Health and the New Mexico Medical Board.

These recommendations were developed by a team represented by the Department of Health, UNM Health Sciences Center, New Mexico Health Resources, the Governor's Office and the Higher Education Department.

###