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Governor Bill Richardson Announces Initiative to Double School-Based Healthcare Centers Across New Mexico

United Health Foundation pledges \$1 million to Support Program

SANTA FE - Governor Bill Richardson announced today a plan to double the number of school-based healthcare centers (SBHC) from 34 sites to 68 over the next 12 months. This effort will be helped by a \$1 million donation from United Health Foundation.

Earlier this year, at the Governor's direction, a collaboration of health, education and human services agencies, healthcare providers and community leaders throughout the state initiated this aggressive goal and will now implement their plan.

"School-based healthcare centers are effective because they put critical care- medical and behavioral health services- where kids are. And in a familiar school setting, kids are more likely to seek help for their problems," said Governor Richardson. "Under my plan, there will be at least one school based health center in every county in the state. And this is just the start- in the coming years we intend to increase the number of these centers and to expand the services that are offered."

The Governor's task force targeted 34 districts school districts due to economic as well as health care concerns including the percent of children living in poverty, as well as the rates of youth suicide, teen pregnancies, and high school drop-outs.

When students have access to screenings and medical treatment, particularly in areas with significant unmet needs, the conditions most commonly identified are substance abuse, depression and risk of suicide; diabetes; obesity; lack of immunizations; poorly controlled asthma and other chronic conditions; and the effects of early, unprotected sexual activity including pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases

“We’re excited to begin discussions in our district,” said Don Duran, Superintendent of the Belen School District. “It’s important that teens are provided services in a non-threatening environment where we can assess their needs and provide healthcare resources,” he added.

"School-based health centers address the critical need to improve access to health care for New Mexico youth," stated Dr. Lynne Uhring, President of the New Mexico Pediatric Society. "Because these health centers are in schools, they are friendlier and easier places for young people and are open to all students regardless of ability to pay."

To cover the costs of adding these new sites, in the upcoming budget the Governor is allocating \$3 million in capital outlay funds, and \$3 million for operating expenses from the general fund. Additional funding will come from federal matching dollars for Medicaid eligible services.

“We are tremendously excited about United Health Foundation’s commitment to provide \$1 million for New Mexico’s children,” said the Governor. “I want to personally thank Dr. Craig Keyes, the CEO of UnitedHealthcare of New Mexico and Colorado for their generous and timely support through their non-profit United Health Foundation.” The state will also seek additional partnerships with New Mexico’s healthcare providers for equipment and services needed at these sites.

“Ultimately, good health is a combination of our biology, the behaviors and choices we make, the social environment in which we live, our access to medical care resources and learning at as early an age as possible to manage these factors,” said Dr. Keyes. “We believe the school-based healthcare centers incorporated in Governor Richardson’s program offer a meaningful, long-term approach to improve the health and well being of this underserved segment of our community,” he added.

School-based healthcare centers are part of the Governor’s “Building a Healthy New Mexico” - a comprehensive set of health, education and human services initiatives unveiled in October 2004.

UnitedHealth Group established the **United Health Foundation** in 1999 as a nonprofit, private foundation with a mission to support health and medical decisions that lead to better health outcomes and healthier communities. The United Health Foundation is solely supported by UnitedHealth Group and its family of companies. More information about the United Health Foundation and its work—is available at www.unitedhealthfoundation.org.

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