

Governor-elect can stop harmful Medicaid cuts

Written by By Maria Archuleta N.M. Center on Law and Poverty
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ALBUQUERQUE — Governor-elect Michelle Lujan-Grisham should quash serious cuts to New Mexico’s Medicaid program faces in the [Centennial Care 2.0 waiver](#) approved Dec. 14 by the federal Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services.

The cuts, proposed by the Human Services Department under the Susana Martinez administration, would hurt families and violate federal law according to the New Mexico Center on Law and Poverty.

HSD’s Centennial Care 2.0 waiver proposal asked the federal government for permission to increase New Mexico’s Medicaid premiums and cut retroactive coverage. The cuts are scheduled to roll out in 2019 over a series of months.

“No one should have to choose between putting food on the table and healthcare, but that’s exactly what these cuts would do,” William Townley, an attorney with the New Mexico Center on Law and Poverty, said. “We have vastly improved the health of our state by expanding the number of New Mexicans eligible for Medicaid. These cuts would have a devastating impact on our state’s families and our economy. We urge Governor-elect Lujan-Grisham to rescind or amend these harmful cuts in Centennial Care 2.0.”

HSD’s proposal imposes new patient premiums on low-income adults living just above the poverty line. Research has shown that these fees will cause thousands of New Mexicans to lose healthcare coverage.

For many low-income families, the proposed increase to \$10 a month is prohibitive and would force them to choose between healthcare and other necessities like food, housing and

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transportation. In Oregon, where similar premiums were imposed, 50,000 people lost coverage within nine months of the new policy.

HSD's proposed cuts would also phase-out retroactive coverage, which pays for a Medicaid eligible person's hospital and medical bills incurred up to three months before signing up for Medicaid.

Hospital bills are especially devastating for families on limited income, often ranging from \$10,000 to over \$100,000.

Phasing out retroactive coverage would put New Mexico's families in jeopardy of severe medical debt and force healthcare providers to shoulder increased uncompensated care costs.

"Under federal law, CMS is only allowed to waive certain provisions in Medicaid. CMS ignored those prohibitions today, approving cuts that will reduce access to healthcare coverage and increase medical debt for New Mexico's families," said Abuko D. Estrada, supervising attorney for Healthcare with the New Mexico Center on Law and Poverty.

It would not be unusual for the governor-elect to rescind approved cuts. After being pressured by healthcare advocates, HSD already removed or scaled back a number of harmful provisions in earlier versions of Centennial Care 2.0, including removing premium requirements for additional groups of Medicaid enrollees, removing penalties for missed appointments, and limiting benefits and services for parent/caretakers and children enrolled in the Children's Health Insurance Program.

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