

HB 400 passes through House with overwhelming, bipartisan support

Written by gallupsun
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New Mexico's House of Representatives voted in support of Medicaid Forward (HB 400) March 7 in a 58-10 decision, advancing the legislation to the Senate with a show of bipartisan support. Bill sponsor Rep. Reena Szczepanski led floor debate on the legislation, joined by expert witness Nicolas Cordova, Healthcare Director with the New Mexico Center on Law and Poverty. HB 400 directs the state to study a new affordable healthcare plan that would, using existing federal law, allow New Mexicans who currently make too much to qualify for Medicaid to access coverage through the program by paying for it via affordable, income-based premiums and copays.

"HB 400's bipartisan support makes it clear that our state is committed to finding common-sense solutions to closing the healthcare coverage gaps that far too many fall into," bill sponsor Rep. Reena Szczepanski, D-N.M., said. "This legislation would allow us to chart the most effective way to enhance our existing Medicaid program so that it leverages federal funding, supports our providers, and lowers healthcare costs across our state."

To qualify for Medicaid, an individual must make less than \$18,756 annually, which is less than the minimum wage for a full-time worker. The plan described in HB 400 seeks to address the coverage gap that results when someone receives a raise that makes them ineligible for Medicaid. HB 400 directs the Human Services Department to conduct a comprehensive study of the plan by October 2024, including the needed financing, provider reimbursement rates required to maximize healthcare access, and a process for maximizing federal funding to guarantee affordability and choice for enrollees.

The Legislature would then determine whether to move forward with appropriation and implementation.

During debate, Szczepanski emphasized the significant federal funding that would be available for this program. New Mexico receives around a 73% match in federal funding for the existing Medicaid Program. This plan would be funded at the same rate, while remaining costs could be covered by participants paying for coverage on a sliding scale based on their income. The study as outlined in HB 400 would allow HSD to determine the federal, state, and enrollee costs required to support the plan.

"As a healthcare provider, I can't think of a better way to efficiently increase access to

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healthcare in our state,” Anjali Taneja MD MPH, Executive Director at Casa de Salud, said. “Medicaid is a robust, comprehensive program that already provides high-quality, affordable care to almost half of our state’s residents. By directing more resources to the program, this plan would simplify the administrative process and increase reimbursement rates—making New Mexico a more enticing state for providers to work in.”

The House vote comes after HB 400’s successful passage through the House Health and Human Services committee and House Appropriations and Finance Committee. Supporters from across the state, including healthcare providers, business owners, and community members, joined each committee hearing to speak to the legislation’s potential to dramatically increase healthcare affordability and urge legislators to move it forward.

With the successful passage through the House, the legislation now heads to the Senate.

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