New Mexico to study universal health plans

July 21 2006

Gov. Bill Richardson says he is taking steps to do something for the thousands of New Mexico residents who lack health insurance.

Looking for a long-term solution, Richardson announced Thursday that a task force will study universal coverage models and make recommendations in time to prepare a bill for the 2008 legislative session, the Santa Fe New Mexican reports.

One of the plans the panel will study has been adopted by Massachusetts, which became the first state to require that all residents have access to health insurance.

New Mexico has the second highest number of uninsured residents in the nation, the newspaper said.

In the short-term, Richardson has proposed some $77 million in new spending to reduce the number of uninsured by as many as 59,000 in two years, the Albuquerque Journal says.

Richardson plans to ask lawmakers to expand Medicaid to cover adults without children who earn 100 percent or less of the federal poverty level. Currently only parents who earn 30 percent of the federal poverty level can receive benefits.

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Citation: New Mexico to study universal health plans (2006, July 21) retrieved 19 April 2024 from https://medicalxpress.com/news/2006-07-mexico-universal-health.html

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