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Contact: Deborah Busemeyer
Office: 827-2619, Cell: 470-2290

Governor Bill Richardson Appoints Sam Howarth to Lead Health Policy Commission

Department of Health to Support Commission in Fulfilling Mission

SANTA FE— Governor Bill Richardson today announced he is taking steps to streamline the New Mexico Health Policy Commission to keep it viable in the face of deep budget cuts. Earlier this year, the New Mexico Legislature reduced the Commission’s budget by about one third for the upcoming fiscal year.

Governor Richardson has appointed Sam Howarth, PhD, the Department of Health’s Director of Policy and Performance, to oversee the Commission’s operations and coordinate the Department’s work to support specific projects at the Commission. Howarth will continue in his role at the Department of Health as well as support the Health Policy Commission starting July 6.

“We need the Department of Health to partner with the Health Policy Commission to help the agency continue its role in providing research, guidance and recommendations on health policy issues that affect New Mexicans,” Governor Richardson said. “As the State copes with economic hardships and tighter budgets, it’s important that we look for ways to maximize efficiencies, and I have complete confidence in Sam Howarth’s ability to carry the work of the Commission to the next level.”

The New Mexico Health Policy Commission is a state agency that was established by statute in 1991 to provide independent research, guidance, and recommendations on health policy issues that impact the planning of health care and health systems for New Mexico. The New Mexico Legislature reduced the agency’s budget by about 37% from almost 1.3 million in FY 2009 to about \$811,000 in FY 2010, which starts July 1.

“Our mission and work at the Department of Health closely aligns with that of the Health Policy Commission, and our staff will be able to collaborate with Commission staff and Commissioners so that the agency will continue to provide research and policy recommendations to help improve the health of New Mexicans,” Howarth said.

By statute, the Governor appoints key staff to the Commission and the nine commissioners. Howarth is replacing Liz Stephanics who resigned as director in March.

We are looking forward to working closely with the Department of Health on health issues, including health workforce issues because of the shortage of medical providers that we have in the state,” said Dr. Frank Hesse, Chairman of the Health Policy Commission. “We are meeting with Mr. Howarth soon to determine the Commission’s priorities for the future.”

For more information on the Health Policy Commission's role, look up www.hpc.state.nm.us.

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