

## Governor signs landmark bills to improve healthcare affordability, access

Written by gallupsun  
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TRUTH OR CONSEQUENCES, New Mexico — Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham signed into law legislation that builds on the administration's work to make healthcare more affordable and accessible for every New Mexican on March 1.

“Delivering quality healthcare to New Mexico’s population requires a tailored approach that takes into account rural communities, New Mexicans benefiting from Medicaid, and the tens of thousands of public employees in our state,” Lujan Grisham said. “These are bills that are going to positively impact a vast swath of New Mexicans.”

The governor signed these important healthcare bills during a ceremony at Sierra Vista Hospital in Truth or Consequences.

“The signing of this legislation brings immediate assistance to our community by helping us meet the needs of our residents and the thousands of New Mexicans who frequent Elephant Butte State Park and Lake annually,” Frank Cochran, CEO of Sierra Vista Hospital, said. “Furthermore, the funds allocated through this legislation will stabilize our current operations and allow us to expand our much-needed behavioral health capacity, surgical services, and establish additional services.”

**House Bill 7**, Healthcare Affordability Fund, reduces insurance costs for small businesses, employees, and low-to moderate-income individuals through the state’s health insurance exchange program, beWellnm. Since its creation in 2021, the Health Care Affordability Fund programs have saved New Mexicans approximately \$45 million on health insurance premiums, offering relief to over 6,000 small businesses and 41,000 employees. The bill maintains a 55% premium surtax distribution to the fund ensuring ongoing future support for the program. The bill is sponsored by Reps. Reena Szczepanski and Meredith Dixon and Sen. Siah Correa Hemphill.

“Since it was created in 2021, the Healthcare Affordability Fund has made our state healthier by helping tens of thousands of New Mexicans attain affordable health insurance,” lead sponsor House Majority Whip Reena Szczepanski said. “House Bill 7 will sustain the Healthcare Affordability Fund so that workers continue to get the coverage they need, small businesses can offer the benefits their employees deserve, and we can keep cutting New Mexico’s uninsured rate, which will reduce costs for everyone.”

**Senate Bill 14**, Health Care Authority, finalizes the establishment of a single unified department responsible for health care purchasing, oversight, and policy. The Health Care Authority will enhance coordination in the purchasing of health care for the state's 180,000 public employees with a focus on improving plan design and affordability. The bill is sponsored by Sens. Elizabeth Stefanics, Mimi Stewart, Michael Padilla and Peter Wirth.

"Every New Mexican deserves to have access to health care. Building off our efforts last year to establish the Health Care Authority, this measure will now help in streamlining the collaboration between the Department of Health and the Health Care Authority in the sharing of data, and ultimately improve health care access and affordability across the state," Stefanics said.

**Senate Bill 17**, Health Care Delivery and Access Act, supports access to care in rural New Mexico by establishing a Medicaid Directed Payment Program. By leveraging hospital assessments, the program will generate \$1.3 billion in federal funds for hospitals in the state. This landmark legislation supports long-term financial stability and access to hospitals statewide, ensuring continued healthcare services in rural New Mexico, where rural hospitals often struggle to stay above the bottom line. The bill is sponsored by Sens. Stefanics, Padilla and Martin Hickey and Reps. Doreen Gallegos and Jason Harper.

"Nearly a third of rural hospitals in New Mexico are at risk of closure due to financial challenges," Stefanics said. "This new opportunity allowed in federal regulation to increase Medicaid payments to hospitals is a game-changer that will give New Mexico the resources we sorely need to provide better care in New Mexico. I want to thank Governor Lujan Grisham for her commitment to improving health care across the state but especially for her continued support for our rural communities."

**Senate Bill 161**, Acute Care Facilities Subsidies, creates a temporary financial assistance grant program for independent rural hospitals until long-term support from SB 17 is enacted in early 2025. Recognizing the immediate challenges faced by these hospitals, the program aims to prevent any closures and further reductions in services. The bill is sponsored by Sens. George Muñoz and Pat Woods.

"Rural and regional hospitals are the heart of our communities and many of them are hanging on by a thread. Passing this measure and providing this funding is critical to their operations

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and will help ease some of the very real financial pressures they are facing, allowing them to stay open and prioritize the health and well-being of local residents,” Muñoz said. “Thank you to Governor Lujan Grisham for signing this bill and looking out for our rural hospitals.”

The governor also signed the following health care bills on March 1:

- **House Bill 33**, Prescription Drug Price Transparency Act, sponsored by Reps. Pamelya Herndon, Cristina Parajon, Sens. Bill Tallman and Stefanics.
- **House Bill 165**, Pharmacy Provider Reimbursement, sponsored by Reps. Gail Armstrong, Tara Jaramillo, Sens. Crystal R. Diamond and Pete Campos.
- **Senate Bill 135**, Step Therapy Guidelines, sponsored by Sens. Craig W. Brandt, Siah Correa Hemphill, Antonio Maestas, Daniel A. Ivey-Soto, and Stefanics.

