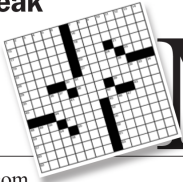


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Medicaid Redesign Concerns Advocates

Public hearings

- July 6 — Clovis
- July 12 — Farmington
- July 26 — Roswell
- July 27 — Las Cruces
- July 28 — Albuquerque
- Aug. 2 — Santa Fe
- Aug. 3 — Albuquerque (Tribal consultation)

By DAN BOYD
Journal Capitol Bureau

SANTA FE — Despite assurances from top-ranking state officials that a redesign of Medicaid planned by Gov. Susana Martinez won't bump New Mexicans off the rolls of the health care program, the anticipated overhaul is getting a chilly reception.

State legislators and health care advocates voiced concerns at a hearing Tuesday about whether there's a need for sweeping state changes to Medicaid, with implementation of the federal health care overhaul looming in 2014.

States are preparing to take certain steps, such as setting up a health care

insurance exchange or having the federal government do it for them, under the controversial federal Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act.

"We might be hurting ourselves in a couple of years if we start making these massive changes," said Sen. Gerald Ortiz y Pino, D-Albuquerque.

Top officials with the state's Human Services Department, which is overseeing the Medicaid redesign, say details of the changes to the state program haven't been finalized.

Some ideas being considered include requiring co-payments for emergency room visits and rewarding Medicaid recipients who show positive behaviors — such as quitting smoking and getting

vaccinations — with a cash savings on other medical expenses.

"We're not going after Medicaid," Human Services Secretary Sidonie Squier said during Tuesday's meeting of the Legislative Health and Human Services Committee. "What we want to do is benefit New Mexicans."

The secretary made it clear, however, that she's concerned about the program's projected growth.

Medicaid is a joint federal-state program that serves one in four New Mexicans — more than 550,000 people — by providing health care services to low-income families and pregnant women, individuals with disabilities and others. Squier said an additional 130,000 to

175,000 individuals are expected to be added to the state's Medicaid rolls when the federal health care law takes effect, though the federal government will pick up much of the associated costs, at least initially.

"I think the program is in jeopardy," Squier said. "If we want to maintain the program for the future, we have to make changes now."

In addition to keeping spending in check, another goal of the Medicaid redesign is to give New Mexico more flexibility in how it runs its program, she said.

Some people at the hearing Tuesday said they're frightened by talk of a

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Medicaid Redesign Draws Criticism From Advocates

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"redesign."

"When we hear that, it scares us that it means cuts," said Bill Jordan, policy director for New Mexico Voices for Children.

The state Human Services Department has hired a Wash-

ington, D.C.-based consultant on a \$1.7 million contract to help craft the Medicaid plan.

Agency officials also announced Tuesday they will hold hearings in six cities statewide in July and August to gather public comment.