

Legislature urged to overturn veto on state's first diabetes action plan

Editorial

There are few things that present a greater challenge to New Mexico's future prosperity and quality of life than the diabetes epidemic. How the state confronts diabetes today could be the most important legacy our generation of leaders can leave for the future. The impact of diabetes on the citizens of New Mexico cannot be overstated. Over 248,000 people, more than 12 percent of the state's adult population, are now living with diabetes. Another 615,000 are estimated to have pre diabetes, many of whom will develop diabetes in the future without intervention.

Estimates of the medical and non-medical costs of diabetes in New Mexico are as high as \$2.2 billion a year, according to the Institute for Alternative Futures (altfutures.org). Simply put, the direct and indirect cost of diabetes to the state's economy is roughly equivalent to 13% of the state budget. And it is going to get worse. In another ten years those costs are expected to approach three billion dollars annually. Over 300,000 New Mexican citizens will have diabetes, either diagnosed or undiagnosed. Another 675,000 thousand will have pre diabetes. The financial toll inflicted on New Mexico by diabetes is staggering. Moreover, left unaddressed, the human toll is, and will continue to be, catastrophic.

Clearly, it is time for action. Action for the sake of the thousands of New Mexico's residents affected by the diabetes epidemic and the many additional tens of thousands who will be affected in the future. New Mexico simply cannot accept the status quo in diabetes prevention and care. Not when there are meaningful steps that can be taken to help the thousands of health care professionals, educators, volunteers and others already enlisted in the fight against diabetes. Leaders in state government took a chance and joined them in the fight by doing something that will have lasting positive impact on the future of the state and its citizens. HB 87 passed both the House and the Senate of the New Mexico General Assembly. It would create a framework and guidelines for developing of a comprehensive, statewide diabetes action plan that would bring a new level of coordination and accountability to New Mexico's efforts to fight diabetes.

Despite passing both chambers overwhelmingly, Governor Susana Martinez vetoed the legislation. Similar legislation already in place in 19 other states is enabling government leaders and health care professionals to develop new strategies to bring efficiency and improved communications to their fight against diabetes. New levels of coordination and collaboration among government agencies are being required that are making state efforts more efficient and effective.

Today, the impact and financial toll of diabetes in those states are being viewed, in many cases for the first time, in relationship

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to other chronic diseases so that care and prevention strategies can be improved. Bureaucratic barriers are being brought down and turf battles eliminated as agencies learn to work together. Requiring state agencies to collaborate in the preparation and execution of a statewide diabetes action plan creates an environment in which everyone has access to all of the important information necessary to develop more effective strategies and brings much needed accountability to their efforts.

Another significant feature of the proposed legislation is the fact that it acknowledges the tangible role that health care providers, diabetes educators and others play in the sponsorship and expansion of prevention strategies and seeks to more effectively assimilate the energies of thousands of groups and individuals already at work in diabetes education prevention and care. Inexplicably, there are those in the state government who oppose what is fiscally sound and politically benign legislation that could actually save the state millions of dollars, not to mention the lives of New Mexico citizens. Diabetes is destroying lives in New Mexico. It is destroying families. And it is costing billions of dollars every year in direct and indirect costs to the state's economy.

A comprehensive, statewide diabetes action plan can be a valuable tool for making prevention efforts more effective and existing programs more accountable. We ask legislators to ignore the false claims of those whose sole motivation appears to be the desire to protect the status quo. We urge you to overturn this veto and advance this important legislation that will put New Mexico at the forefront of the war against diabetes.

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Conflict of interest

Author declares that there is no conflict of interest.