

For Immediate Release

02/17/22

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New Mexico Legislature Funds Important Public Health Innovations

Bills will save lives, but long-term planning and investments are necessary

“New Mexico’s communities most impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic are set to receive significant help due to strides taken by the New Mexico legislature this session,” says Shelley Mann-Lev, Board President of the New Mexico Public Health Association (NMPHA). NMPHA is a 500+ member public health workforce association and the state affiliate of the American Public Health Association.

Critical public health legislation that passed through the legislature and onto the Governor’s desk for signature includes [HB 52](#), the Harm Reduction Act Amendments. HB52 allows the NM Department of Health to distribute fentanyl test strips and sterile supplies to reduce overdose and the spread of infectious disease and enables the department to act quickly to address other lethal additives in drugs.

NMPHA also hails the passage of [HB 95](#), the Easy Enrollment Act, which will help more New Mexicans get health insurance. The bill allows New Mexicans to check a box on their tax return so that the Department of Human Services can determine their eligibility for Medicaid and other subsidized health insurance.

Environmental justice took a huge step forward with the adoption of [HB 164](#). The NM Environment Department will work to clean up and reclaim former uranium mine and mill sites and the bill creates the Uranium Mine Revolving Fund. “The voices of communities and the Navajo Nation were heard,” says Anna Rondon of the NM Social Justice & Equity Institute and Board Co-President Elect of NMPHA.

New Mexicans can look forward to the design of a statewide Paid Family and Medical Leave (PFML) plan. The new PFML Task Force is established in [SM 1](#), which also passed. State-based PFML policies allow employees and employers to pay into a fund that provides paid leave to employees to care for a new baby, a sick family member, or themselves when they have medical challenges.

Not all public health innovations made it through the session. The legislature failed to pass [SB 119](#), which would have established a state School of Public Health and provided valuable training and workforce development across the state. The legislature did provide start-up funds to establish the School, but much more is needed. School-

Based Health Centers, which provide essential screenings and medical and behavioral health services for students did not receive a budget expansion via [SB 67](#), leaving many New Mexican teens and children without access to health care.

“We’re pleased by the ways the legislature has addressed the needs of New Mexico’s communities most impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic,” says Shelley Mann-Lev, Board President of NMPHA. “The New Mexico Public Health Association continues to advocate for budgets and legislation that advance health equity and justice in New Mexico.”

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