

# UNM: Using the Legislative Process to Improve Health Workforce Data Collection

In 2012, the Governor of New Mexico signed the [Health Care Workforce Data Collection, Analysis and Policy Act \(House Bill 19\)](#), authorizing the University of New Mexico Health Sciences Center to collect and store data across all licensing boards. This gave the university unprecedented access to health workforce data, which it uses to identify unmet needs in the state and inform changes to the university's policies and programs.

## CHALLENGE

**Lack of access to reliable health workforce data showing where practitioners work and the populations they serve**

The [University of New Mexico \(UNM\) Health Sciences Center](#) wanted to know where their health professions graduates were going on to work, and what kind of patients they were serving. Having this information would help the university assess its impact on health workforce shortages and health disparities in the state. Some data were available from licensing boards, however these datasets were limited and didn't provide reliable information about practice locations (for example, a practitioner could provide his/her home address instead of a work address). The shortcomings of licensure datasets made it difficult for the university to evaluate local health workforce needs and adjust its programs in response.

## SOLUTION

**Work with the Legislature to improve data access**

UNM's Chancellor for Health Sciences collaborated with the New Mexico Legislature on House Bill 19. This bill established the New Mexico Center for Health Workforce Analysis and authorized the Chancellor to maintain a [database of health workforce information](#). Most importantly, the bill mandated that licensing agencies collect new information from all licensed practitioners, including:

- Demographic data, including languages spoken
- Active practice location(s) in New Mexico
- Practice setting (e.g., hospital, clinic, public schools)
- Practice plans for the next five years
- Percentage of practice engaged in direct patient care

"New Mexico has become a national leader in health workforce data collection, analysis and policy research, thanks to vision and cooperative efforts of the New Mexico Legislature and the UNM Health Sciences Center.

The information we are gathering through the professional licensure boards provides an invaluable tool for assessing and responding to our state's most pressing health care needs. It is enabling us to do a better job of serving our fellow New Mexicans."

Paul B. Roth, MD, MS  
Chancellor for Health Sciences  
CEO, UNM Health System  
Dean, UNM School of Medicine

An interdisciplinary working group was convened to analyze the data [and make recommendations to the Legislature](#)—including recommendations for incentives to attract qualified individuals from underrepresented groups to pursue health care education and practice in New Mexico.

## RESULTS

### *New data revealed unmet workforce needs and supported programmatic changes*

The new data revealed unmet workforce needs that the university could then address through its programs. For example, the data obtained on primary care shortages in rural areas prompted legislation to create 18 state-funded GME positions, the nurse practitioner program was increased almost twofold and some debt for service programs were enhanced. Most recently, the data is being used to assess the supply of mental health care workers and how best to address mental health care in New Mexico.

## LESSONS LEARNED

- Using data can help make a compelling case to state legislatures about specific health workforce needs in the state.
- Analysis of the new health workforce data from licensing boards makes it easier for the university to track workforce shortages across the state by discipline.
- The new licensure data helps support changes to university programs and structures that fill workforce gaps.

### **ABOUT THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW MEXICO HEALTH SCIENCES CENTER**

The University of New Mexico Health Sciences Center aims to provide an opportunity for all New Mexicans to obtain an excellent education in the health sciences. We will advance health sciences in the most important areas of human health with a focus on the priority health needs of our communities. As a majority-minority state, our mission will ensure that all populations in New Mexico have access to the highest quality health care.

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## ENDNOTE

<sup>1</sup>The University of New Mexico was uniquely positioned to obtain this authority from the New Mexico Legislature because it is the state's only academic health center and is responsible for preparing the health workforce statewide. Similar collaborations may not be possible in states that are home to more than one academic health center.