



Title: Bipartisan legislation for health care workers

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Bipartisan legislation has been introduced to bring New Mexico into nine major interstate compacts for health care workers.

A bipartisan team of 10 legislators has introduced a package of bills to bring New Mexico into the interstate compacts for physicians, physician assistants, psychologists, counselors, dentists and dental hygienists, emergency medical personnel, audiologists and speech therapists, physical therapists, and occupational therapists.

Joining these interstate compacts was one of the top reforms recommended by the nonpartisan think tank Think New Mexico in its 2024 report, How to Solve New Mexico's Health Care Worker Shortage.

Interstate compacts are agreements among states to recognize and accept professional licenses issued by other states participating in the compact. Without these agreements, doctors and other health care

workers licensed in other states cannot legally provide services in New Mexico – even via telehealth – unless they go through New Mexico's lengthy and burdensome licensing process.

Forty-one states are parties to the Interstate Medical Licensure Compact for physicians, includ-

ing all five states that border New Mexico. Similarly, 44 states are parties to the compact for psychologists; 38 states participate in the compact for physical therapists; 37 states participate in the compact for counselors; 33 states participate in the compact for audiologists and speech therapists; and 31 states participate in the compacts for emergency medical personnel and occupational therapists.

New Mexico's closest neighbors have each adopted five or more interstate compacts – Arizona: six; Colorado: ten; Oklahoma: eight; Utah: nine; and Texas: five – meaning health care workers can move easily among them.

By contrast, New Mexico is one of only five states that have

adopted just one or none of the 10 major interstate health care compacts. Since 2003, New Mexico has been one of 40 states in the Nurse Licensure Compact, which grants nurses a multi-state privilege to practice in other compact states. As many as 80% of the nurses at some New Mexico hospitals, especially in rural and border areas of the state, would not be practicing here but for this compact, according to a January 2018 article from the Albuquerque Journal.

As the New Mexico Medical Board explained in its agency analysis of the bill (quoted in

the Fiscal Impact Report for Senate Bill 46): "States that participate in the compact see a significant increase in physician licensure in their state, which we anticipate would occur in New Mexico."

The compact legislation is supported by a broad coalition including AARP-NM, the U.S. Department of Defense, Greater Albuquerque Chamber of Commerce, League of

Women Voters New Mexico, New Mexico Conference of Catholic Bishops, New Mexico Voices for Children Action Fund, and the New Mexico Public Health Association, among others.

The compacts are also supported by trade groups and governing boards for the various professions covered by the compacts, such as the New Mexico Medical Board, New Mexico Medical Society, New Mexico Chapter of the American Physical Therapy Association, New Mexico Speech Language Hearing Association, New Mexico Counseling Association, and New Mexico College of Emergency Physicians, among others.

Interstate compacts include many safeguards to protect patients. For example, with the Interstate Medical Licensure Compact, state medical boards retain final control over the physician licensure process and

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retain the right to refuse recognition of a license issued by another state. They also have

access to a centralized database of disciplinary action records and the authority to require doctors to submit to FBI fingerprint-based criminal background checks.

“Joining the interstate compacts would immediately expand the supply of health care providers available to care for New Mexicans,” says Fred Nathan, Jr., Executive Director of Think New Mexico. “A remarkably broad coalition has come together to support the passage of these compacts. For example, the Interstate Medical Compact for physicians is supported by both Planned Parenthood of the Rocky Mountains and the New Mexico Conference of Catholic Bishops. In fact, only one special interest stands in the way of New Mexico joining these compacts and opening its doors to more health care workers: the New Mexico Trial Lawyers Association.”

More information is available on Think New Mexico’s website at: www.thinknewmexico.org.