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Contact: Dolores E. Roybal, Executive Director

Office: 505-438-0776, ext. 3 or droybal@conalma.org

Con Alma Releases Landmark Report on Advancing Health Equity through the ACA Interactive Maps Detailing Children’s Insurance Coverage Available

(Santa Fe) – Con Alma Health Foundation announced today that it has released a new report assessing how the Affordable Care Act was implemented in New Mexico, especially focusing on the progress of achieving health equity. The comprehensive study focused on ACA measures intended to assure that all children and families have a fair chance at getting insurance coverage and accessing health care and other social resources which are needed to live a healthy life.

“This pulls together baseline data about New Mexico’s experience with the ACA in a way that hasn’t been available before,” said Dolores E. Roybal, executive director of Con Alma, the state’s largest private foundation dedicated solely to improving health in New Mexico. “We will provide the report to policy makers, stakeholders and health advocates so they can consider ways to maximize the benefits that ACA provides New Mexico.”

Con Alma partnered with the University of New Mexico’s College of Population Health and RWJF Center for Health Policy to conduct the study and New Mexico Alliance of Health Councils to ensure local communities were represented. W.K. Kellogg Foundation awarded Con Alma a \$200,000 grant to make the study and report possible. To view the full report, look up www.conalma.org.

As part of the project, UNM developed interactive maps that detail seven categories of children’s insurance coverage by county. “These maps are a useful tool for anyone interested in learning more about the insurance coverage of New Mexico’s children by such categories as race, place, gender and income,” Roybal said.

To engage with diverse stakeholders across New Mexico, Con Alma held the biggest cross-sector gatherings so far in New Mexico to discuss the ACA, bringing together business and nonprofit leaders, government workers, health providers, policy makers and health advocates to discuss successes and challenges in implementing the ACA. Con Alma will continue to disseminate the report’s findings and work with partners towards achieving health equity, when everyone has an equal chance at living a healthy life, regardless of a person’s ethnicity, income or zip code.

The report includes a section that emphasizes federal opportunities for leveraging the ACA in support of health equity and assesses what is happening in New Mexico. It also summarizes timelines and benchmarks of activities, and describes the successes and challenges of implementing the ACA from diverse stakeholders’ perspectives.

“No study in New Mexico and few studies in the nation use an ‘equity lens’ to assess the implementation of the ACA,” said Lisa Cacari Stone, Ph.D., an associate professor at UNM and the report’s lead researcher and author. “So this community-academic research endeavor allowed us to compile the evidence that is sorely needed in order to track progress and to make future policy decisions that support New Mexico’s children and families.”

Some of the key findings of the report include:

- In February 2016, 54,865 people were enrolled in private plans through the marketplace and it’s projected that 850,000 will be enrolled in Medicaid by the end of 2016.
- Community health workers have been an important part of outreach and insurance enrollment.

- Partnerships between local communities, advocacy organizations, multi-level governments, insurance companies and the health sector are critical in assuring that the ACA works for all New Mexicans regardless of income, geography, race or ethnicity and language spoken.

Recommendations moving forward include:

- Continue to assure all children are insured regardless of race, ethnicity or citizenship status- While almost half of New Mexico's children are covered by Medicaid; 22 percent of Native American and 9 percent of Hispanic children remain uninsured.
- Increase enrollment into New Mexico's Small Business Health Options Program
- Explore opportunities for Native American tribes to purchase health coverage for members who have complex, costly health-care needs
- Equalize payment structures so that doctors and providers working in communities receive reimbursements similar to those working in hospitals
- Simplify eligibility and enrollment processes

The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act of 2010 includes provisions that focus on improving quality of care for racial and ethnic minorities. In New Mexico about 70 percent of children are of color, and almost a third of children live in poverty.

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