

It seems as though New Mexico is seldom on a “good list” so when that happens, it is cause to celebrate and share the good news. *New Mexico’s childhood immunization rates have improved from around 33 percent in 1995 to about 71.6 percent in 2012.* The 40 percent increase even allowed New Mexico to surpass the national average of about 68.4 percent. Much of the success of the childhood immunization rates is credited to the way New Mexico buys the vaccines. Without getting too technical, the state buys the vaccines at a lower than average retail price and distributes them to doctors and clinics. Insurance companies then reimburse the state for the cost of vaccinating the insured children. This is known as “Universal Vaccine Purchase.” New Mexico is one of nine states that buys and distributes the vaccines this way, which has also worked well in the other states.

But last year some insurance companies decided to challenge the way reimbursements were made, thereby jeopardizing the entire system. As health care providers, we understand the importance of maintaining a system that has worked so effectively to protect children from terrible diseases. We knew that if changes were made to disrupt the system, children would suffer the consequences. So we reached out to Senator Michael S. Sanchez; others from Bernalillo County enlisted support from Senator Bill O’Neill as well.

Senator Sanchez listened to our concerns and took action. He brought all of the stakeholders (including health care providers, pharmaceutical companies, health insurance companies, Department of Health, and the Insurance Division) together to resolve the issue. His underlying message was that we are all obligated to do the right thing, especially when it concerns children. By holding everyone’s feet to the fire, Senator Sanchez was instrumental in maintaining the existing system and ultimately saving Universal Vaccine Purchase.

His leadership has protected New Mexico’s children, as well as the rest of us, from disease. It is our hope that as Universal Vaccine Purchase remains in effect, New Mexico’s immunization rates will continue to climb to a place where we want to be; on the top of a list of states with a great record of protecting their kids with immunizations. This is so important because when our children are healthy, we all benefit.