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**CONTACT:**  
Tom Bunnell, (603) 491-1924

## **Statement on Executive Council Decision to Bypass Exchange Planning Grant**

CONCORD – Today, the Executive Council rejected a \$333,000 federal planning grant to explore the potential for a New Hampshire-crafted health benefit Exchange.

An Exchange is a health insurance marketplace option intended to give individuals and small businesses more choice about what insurance plans they can buy and how much they pay for coverage. Under the new health law, grant funding was made available for states to explore whether or not they would like to create a state-based Exchange and, if they choose, to design and establish their own Exchange at no cost to the state.

New Hampshire’s decision not to explore the new opportunity – thus bypassing the later option for local control in the design, creation, and operation of a state-based Exchange - means that the federal Department of Health and Human Services will instead create an Exchange to bring greater choice for affordable, quality health insurance to consumers and families in New Hampshire.

“Opting to allow the federal government to plan and create the Exchange for New Hampshire means that our state legislature will no longer have direct control in shaping or directing the effort, and that state officials will have less influence on the structure and operations of the Exchange,” said **Tom Bunnell, policy consultant for NH Voices for Health**. “However, consumers and small businesses will still benefit from a state Exchange established by the federal government. Exchanges are important tools for consumers, providing individuals and small businesses with a one-stop shop to find and compare affordable, quality health insurance options.”

The \$333,000 grant would have been used to conduct an analysis of the information technology systems and supports that New Hampshire would need to establish any of a variety of Exchange models in our state. Forty-five other states and the District of Columbia have accepted an Exchange planning grant of some sort, including the vast majority of those states that are challenging the health reform law through litigation.

“Exchanges will allow consumers to make apples-to-apples comparisons between health insurance plans, introducing new transparency into the marketplace. They also are intended to help lower costs by increasing competition between insurance companies, and by allowing individuals and small businesses to band together to purchase insurance,” **Bunnell** said. “While it may be disappointing that the Executive Council has chosen not to put New Hampshire in the driver’s seat when it comes to planning an Exchange for our state, consumers and businesses can look forward to working with federal experts as they begin exploring what model could work best for New Hampshire.”

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*NH Voices for Health coordinates a statewide policy network of individuals, small businesses and advocacy organizations committed to ensuring a strong, high quality and affordable health care system for the families and businesses of our state. The network represents over 200,000 members, consumers and constituents statewide.*