

## **New Mexico OKs fees for medical marijuana program**

**By TIM KORTE - Dec 17, 2010 3:11 PM MT**

**By The Associated Press**

**ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. (AP) — The state Department of Health announced several changes to New Mexico's medical marijuana program Friday, including fees to finance the effort despite concerns that smaller producers could be forced out of business.**

**The new annual fees will be based on how long a grower has operated, ranging from \$5,000 for producers licensed for less than a year up to \$30,000 for those licensed for more than three years. Until now, other agency programs had financed medical marijuana.**

**Meanwhile, in another change that was welcomed by advocacy groups, Health Secretary Dr. Alfredo Vigil agreed to license eight new growers, boosting the state total to 25 in a push to increase plant production and serve more patients.**

**Since the program started in 2007, the state has faced problems ensuring a steady supply.**

**Vigil also agreed to allow growers to produce 150 mature plants and seedlings. Under earlier regulations, the limit was 95 plants.**

**"What we heard from patients is that they are still having trouble getting the medicine," Vigil said.**

**Attorney Paul Livingston of Placitas, who represents the three-month-old New Mexico Medical Cannabis Producers' Guild, said he was encouraged by the increases.**

**However, he questioned whether state officials had adequately analyzed how the fees will affect smaller growers. Some producers have suggested a fixed dollar amount would allow larger, well-capitalized producers to continue but could harm small operations.**

**"There is a great deal of concern over whether this model will work, but we are hopeful the state will continue looking at these things," Livingston said.**

**Sheila Lewis, acting director for the Drug Policy Alliance of New Mexico, called the changes "a victory for the most seriously ill and vulnerable New Mexicans" because they address the marijuana shortages.**

**"The increased number of suppliers will help to solve that problem," she said. "The department needed to increase fees to pay for the costs of administering the program, but the higher fees are only economically feasible for the suppliers if they are allowed higher plant limits."**

**State health officials are planning to visit prospective new growers. Agency spokeswoman Deborah Busemeyer said selections will be identified by Dec. 31 and patients will receive contact information within the next two months.**

**Gov.-elect Susana Martinez takes office Jan. 1 but Busemeyer said the change in administration won't affect implementation of program changes.**

**There are more than 3,000 medical marijuana patients in New Mexico, including about 1,400 who are licensed to produce their own supply.**

**To qualify for New Mexico's medical marijuana program, patients must have a physician certify they have one of 16 qualifying conditions. Vigil rejected a proposal to list depression as a condition, going against an advisory board's recommendation. Copyright © 2010 Associated Press. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten, or redistributed.**