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Besio named to lead state health reform

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NEWS

MONTPELIER - A former state mental health commissioner was tapped Tuesday to lead state government through its new health care reform initiative. **Susan Besio**, currently the director of operations and planning at the Human Services Agency, essentially will act as the health reform initiative czar when she takes her new position on June 5.

Her formal title will be director of health care reform implementation and she will be responsible for launching a new health insurance product as well as integrating the various other provisions included in the bill adopted by the Legislature.

The bill, signed into law last week by Gov. James Douglas, will create the Catamount Health insurance plan, designed to provide state-subsidized private health insurance to those without coverage now.

The initiative also will include an effort to drive down overall health care costs - both for those with and without insurance now - by more comprehensively providing care for such chronic conditions as diabetes, health ailments and cancer.

Besio has held a number of positions in state government, including as deputy commissioner and then commissioner of mental health.

In her current role at the agency that oversees mental health and a myriad of other social services, **Besio** has been responsible for such things as last year's successful effort by the administration to reform the Medicaid health insurance plan for the poor.

Administration Secretary Michael Smith, to whom **Besio** will report, said **Besio's** experience in health care prepared her well for the new assignment.

"Her background in public health administration and operational experience in state government make her the ideal candidate to take on this important challenge at this time," Smith said.

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