

SB 974 (Lara) - Health4All Elders

California's uninsured rate is at a historic low of 6.8% thanks to our robust implementation of the Affordable Care Act (ACA), which has brought health coverage to an additional 7 million Californians. In 2015, California made a critical investment to provide comprehensive full-scope Medi-Cal to all children (**Health4All Kids**), regardless of where they were born. Unfortunately, federal law explicitly and unjustly excludes undocumented immigrants, including elders over the age of 65, from receiving health coverage through Medi-Cal, and from selecting a health plan or receiving subsidies for Covered California. As a result, undocumented adults are still left without comprehensive health care.

SB 974 (Lara) removes an eligibility barrier to full-scope Medi-Cal for low-income undocumented elders. This investment builds on the gains California has made and takes the Golden State one step closer to universal coverage. Ensuring that all low-income elders have access to health care, regardless of their immigration status, is a key part of any strategy to reach this goal. California is stronger when everyone has access to health care. We're all in this together, and we're all healthier when all are covered.

SB 974 would make full-scope Medi-Cal available for income-eligible undocumented California elders ages 65 years or older by removing immigration status as an exclusionary barrier.

Health4All Elders



Removing immigration exclusions to Medi-Cal for elderly Californians is a critical step forward towards universal coverage. Aging undocumented Californians have lived in our state for decades raising families and paying billions in local and state taxes, as well as Medicare and Social Security.ⁱ Yet, they will never see the fruit of that labor as they retire without safety net access or health care.

Californians' well-being counts on routine care, prescriptions for health conditions, and vital follow-up care that reduce the cost of undiagnosed chronic illness and prevent treatable conditions from becoming life threatening emergencies.

Including Californians in our health system, including undocumented immigrants who are our parents, grandparents, neighbors, community members, and colleagues is essential to

growing a strong economy and building a vibrant and inclusive California.

Health4All Moves California Closer to Universal Coverage

Over the last year, we have witnessed a barrage of attacks on health care at the federal level, including multiple efforts to repeal the ACA, the elimination of the individual mandate penalty in the federal tax bill, and various administrative actions that undermine access to care. California has worked to shield our state from these attacks to the extent possible.

California must continue to champion bold and inclusive policies that support the health of our communities and work against xenophobic federal policies. **Of the nearly 3 million Californians who remain uninsured, 58% are undocumented adults.**ⁱⁱ SB 974 (Lara) removes a barrier to health access due to immigration status for all income eligible elders and brings California closer to ensuring that every Californian has comprehensive, affordable, and accessible care.

California already provides near-universal coverage for children, thanks in large part to the Health4All Kids program, which was implemented on May 16, 2016. The 2015-16 state budget ([SB 75](#)) included an investment to expand full-scope Medi-Cal to all low-income children under the age of 19, regardless of immigration status. **Under the implementation of Health4All Kids, over 218,000 undocumented children have received comprehensive care.**ⁱⁱⁱ This expansion was possible thanks to the efforts of directly impacted individuals, advocates, and legislative leaders. This proposal brings our state closer to universal coverage by building on the successful model of Health4All Kids, to ensure that full-scope Medi-Cal is available to all low-income undocumented elders.

The Impact of Being Uninsured & Undocumented



Undocumented and uninsured Californians live sicker, die younger, and are one emergency away from financial ruin because they lack access to comprehensive health coverage. Under current law, low-income undocumented adults are eligible for emergency-only Medi-Cal but not for primary or preventive care offered through full-scope Medi-Cal. Though some California counties provide some care to undocumented adults through their safety-net systems, many do not.^{iv} **This reality has tremendous health and economic impacts on families and our state where 1 in 6 of all California children have at least one undocumented parent.**^v Our health care system works better when all California residents, regardless of immigration status, have access to health care.

Key Points

- **Medi-Cal for low-income undocumented elders builds on the success of the Health4All Kids model** and strengthens our state by ensuring that all eligible elderly Californians have access to health care.
- **SB 974 ensures that our aging undocumented Californians who have lived in our state for decades and have paid billions in local and state taxes, have access to health care as they retire from a lifetime of economic contributions to our state.**
- **Health4All low-income undocumented continues California's well-established tradition of covering immigrant populations in Medi-Cal** who are excluded from federal programs.^{vi}
- **No one should suffer or die from a treatable condition because of where they were born.** Our health care system is stronger and more cost-efficient when we detect and treat preventable conditions early, rather than force patients to resort to the emergency room for care.

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ⁱ <https://www.vox.com/2018/4/13/17229018/undocumented-immigrants-pay-taxes>

ⁱⁱ <http://www.itup.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Remaining-Uninsured-Fact-Sheet-11-21-17.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ Department of Health Care Services. (2017). SB 75 Transitions and New Enrollees by County. Retrieved from: http://www.dhcs.ca.gov/services/medi-cal/eligibility/Documents/SB75/SB75_Enrollees_County_120417.pdf

^{iv} Health Access California, Re-Orienting the Safety Net for the Remaining Uninsured, March, 2015. http://www.health-access.org/images/pdfs/county_safety_net_survey_reportupdate_march15final.pdf

^v <http://dornsife.usc.edu/csii/undocumentedca/>

^{vi} California has provided health coverage to newly qualified immigrants (green card holders in the U.S. for less than five years) and immigrants with deferred action status (such as DACA recipients).