

HEALTH4ALL: FULL-SCOPE MEDICAL FOR UNDOCUMENTED SENIORS

SB 29 (DURAZO)

Everyone Covered – No One Left Out: Addressing California’s Health Care Crisis

Undocumented Californians are facing a health care crisis. Over the last few years, the federal government has carried out harmful attacks on immigrant communities by separating families, increasing deportations, and undermining our health care system and safety net. This has resulted in serious trauma that is affecting the physical and mental well-being of many Californians. Yet, over 1 million undocumented Californians who would otherwise be eligible for the comprehensive services provided under Medi-Cal remain unjustly excluded from our public health programs simply because of where they were born.

SB 29 would continue California’s leadership in modeling a path to universal coverage by becoming the first state to provide full-scope Medi-Cal to undocumented seniors (65+).

Undocumented adults make up nearly 10% of our workforce and are parents to more than 1 in 6 children in California.ⁱ They are raising our future leaders and powering the economy by contributing over \$3 billion in state and local taxes annually, yet every day they are suffering due to a lack access to health care. Undocumented seniors who have worked tirelessly for decades to support our state and communities continue to be locked out of receiving the health care they desperately need. They deserve the same opportunity to age with dignity as all other Californians.

Californians Barred from Health Care: Undocumented & Uninsured

The UC Berkeley Labor Center projects that 1.4 million Californians will be barred from health care due to their immigration status, making undocumented Californians the largest single group of uninsured individuals in the state.ⁱⁱ Federal law explicitly excludes undocumented immigrants from receiving health coverage under federal Medicaid, Medicare, and the Affordable Care Act (ACA). Under current state law, low-income undocumented adults over the age of 25 are only eligible for emergency (“restricted-scope”) Medi-Cal.

Lack of access to health coverage harms immigrant communities and our health care system. Health insurance protects individuals from financial distress and excessive out-of-pocket spending, encourages earlier diagnosis of chronic conditions, improves use of preventive services, and reduces preventable mortality.ⁱⁱⁱ No one in our state should have to wait until an emergency to be able to access health care.

The expansion of Medi-Cal, regardless of immigration status, to all income-eligible children in 2016 and young adults in 2020 ensured comprehensive primary and preventative care to hundreds of thousands of young people and a healthier California overall. SB 29 is the next logical step to close a significant gap that remains in our health care system and ensure that we follow our moral responsibility to care for our most vulnerable community members.

By expanding Medi-Cal access to undocumented seniors, we can lower our uninsured rate and ensure a more universal and equitable health care system for all who call California home. Health care is a human right, and our health system is stronger when everyone is included.

For more information, please contact Orville Thomas (othomas@caimmigrant.org) with the California Immigrant Policy Center or Jose Torres Casillas (jtorres@health-access.org) with Health Access California..

i Kenney, Genevieve M., Jennifer M. Haley, and Robin Wang. December 2018. “Proposed Public Charge Rule Could Jeopardize Recent Coverage Gains among Citizen Children.” Washington, DC: Urban Institute.

ii Dietz, Miranda and Laurel Lucia, et al. November 2018. “California’s Health Coverage Gains to Erode Without Further State Action.” UCLA Center for Health Policy Research and UC Berkeley Labor Center.

iii Lucia, Laurel. February 2019. Towards Universal Health Coverage: Expanding Medi-Cal to Low-Income Undocumented Adults. Center for Labor Research and Education, University of California, Berkeley.