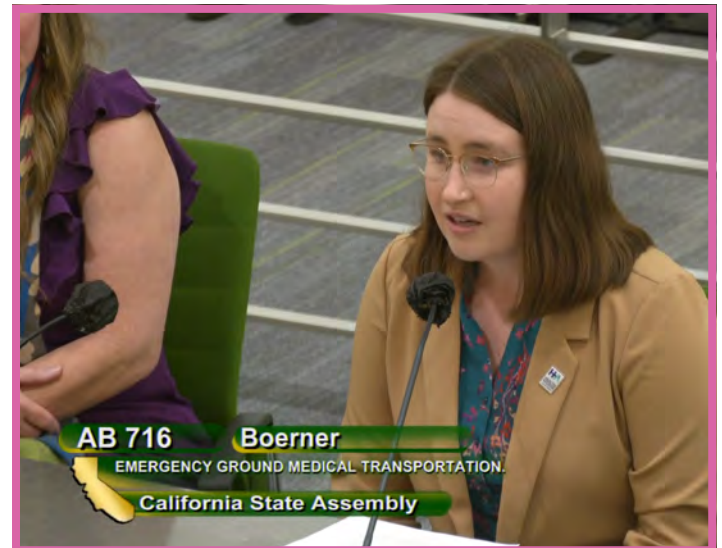




Ending Surprise Ambulance Bills

- + After success at the state and federal level to prevent surprise medical and hospital bills, Health Access again lead the effort in ensuring that Californians would be protected from unpredictable and out-of-control ground ambulance bills.
- + With AB 716 (Boerner) signed into law, Californians should no longer hesitate to call 911 out of fear they will end up with thousands of dollars in out-of-network ambulance charges.
- + Now, insured patients will never be balance billed or charged more than their plan's cost-sharing amount, and uninsured patients will not be billed more than Medicare.



In 2023 Health Access advocated to provide real relief and remove financial barriers to California health consumers—successfully helping increase access to and/or reduce the cost of coverage, care, prescription drugs, and even ground ambulance services. We supported major investments in Medi-Cal to improve access and continue the commitment to expand coverage to all those who are income-eligible, regardless of immigration status. While some efforts stalled, we built a foundation for future progress and furthered our goal towards a quality, equitable, and affordable health system for all Californians.

Making Care More Affordable Covered CA Cost-Sharing Assistance

- + 650,000 Covered California Silver plan enrollees who earn under 250% of the poverty level will see their deductibles eliminated and co-pays drastically reduced in 2024, thanks to Health Access championing to secure over \$82 million in affordability assistance in the state budget.
 - > These Californians now have lower co-pays for doctor visits, prescription drugs, labs, and more that were often a barrier to care.
 - > Deductibles will be zeroed out for these enrollees, preventing many who end up getting admitted to a hospital from having to pay as much as \$5,400 out-of-pocket.
- + Starting in 2025, the state affordability assistance will double to \$165 million annually.
- + The 2023-24 budget also reaffirmed the principle that the funds raised from the state's tax penalty for not having coverage will go back to additional affordability assistance in Covered California.

Capping Rx Co-Pays Permanently

- + Since 2015, California has capped cost-sharing for prescription medications at \$250/month for a 30-day supply.
- + Prior to this policy, some specialty drugs had co-pays as high as hundreds or thousands of dollars, placing huge financial strains on patients with MS and other conditions.
- + Following a previous extension of these protections in 2019, this year Health Access sponsored AB 948 (Berman) to permanently protect the co-pay caps, which was signed into law by the Governor.

Improving & Expanding Medi-Cal Removing Access Barriers Based on Immigration Status



- + The decade-long #Health4All campaign will achieve a major goal in January 2024 when Medi-Cal fully removes eligibility exclusions for undocumented immigrants. Building on past expansions for children, young adults, and those over 50, Medi-Cal will be available to another 750,000 income-eligible Californians aged 26-49.
- + Health Access is working to ensure a smooth implementation for those who will be newly enrolled and those being “lifted and shifted” from emergency restricted scope programs to full-scope Medi-Cal, and from county programs.
- + Working with local partners, we are active in efforts to expand county programs, like the County Medical Services Program and Contra Costa Cares, to cover more of the uninsured.
- + In 2023 the #Health4All campaign laid the groundwork to expand beyond Medi-Cal and allow access to Covered California to all regardless of immigration status, which we will continue to advocate for in 2024.

Increased Provider Payments

- + This year’s budget deal committed \$19 billion over the next several years to improve Medi-Cal, raised from the federal government through the quicker, faster, and bigger renewal of a managed care organization (MCO) tax.
- + The resources will go to increase Medi-Cal reimbursements in primary, maternity, behavioral health services, and other areas to improve access for Medi-Cal patients. The budget package also included \$300 million for a distressed hospital fund.

Controlling Health Care Costs Creating a New Office of Health Care Affordability

- + Starting in earnest this year, California’s Office of Health Care Affordability is an ambitious effort to set and enforce a health care cost growth target.
- + Housed within the Department of Health Care Access and Information, the new Office hired a director and staff and built out a structure, board, and Advisory Committee. As an appointed member of the Advisory Committee, Health Access has worked to engage consumer, employer, and labor stakeholders, and provide key feedback to the board.
- + While enacting the Office's significant enforcement powers will take years, the actions taken this year send a powerful signal to the health industry to focus on lowering their costs and improving value now, because greater accountability and oversight is coming.

Greater Cost Transparency

- + A new Health Payments Database—decades in the making and supported by health advocates—is operational and has started producing its first reports, bringing a new level of transparency to our whole health system.

Lowering Prescription Drug Costs



- + The CalRx program signed a partnership contract with Civica Rx for the development and direct manufacture of a generic competitor for insulin, creating an environment that led incumbent PHRMA companies to dramatically reduce the price for some of their generic insulin products. CalRx also began efforts to contract for the production of a generic of Naloxone.
- + Health Access has been monitoring this work at the state level, and helped in the push to pass the provisions of the Inflation Reduction Act that allows Medicare to negotiate the cost of certain prescription drugs, which went into effect this year.

Initial 2024 Outlook

While significant steps were taken this year in reducing out-of-pocket costs, increasing access to care, and lowering underlying health care costs, there remain several items of unfinished business that Health Access looks forward to continuing to fight for in 2024 and beyond:

- + Greater oversight for health care consolidation, preventing anti-competitive contracting, and other practices that are major drivers of inflated health care costs.
- + Ensuring accurate, updated provider directories.
- + New transparency for hospital community benefits.
- + Opening up Covered California to all regardless of immigration status.
- + Continuing efforts towards health equity and reduced racial, ethnic, and LGBTQ disparities.
- + Pushing forward toward a truly universal, affordable, equitable and unified health system.



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