

SB4: Building the Momentum for #Health4All

Bipartisan Support to Expand Coverage Regardless of Immigration Status

Revised: June 12, 2015

As recently amended and passed by the Senate on a historic bipartisan vote (28-11), [SB4](#) (Lara) takes key steps toward expanding coverage regardless of immigration status. It would...

- Expand Medi-Cal eligibility to all children regardless of immigration status. This would be guaranteed.
- Expand coverage for undocumented adults, as budget allocations will allow, to be decided each year in the budget. Enrollment in comprehensive Medi-Cal will be capped if funding runs out.
- Allow all Californians, regardless of immigration status, to purchase coverage through Covered California using their own money.



The Need for SB4

The federal government explicitly excludes undocumented immigrants from eligibility and financial help for health coverage under federal programs, including Medicaid. Nor can undocumented Californians use the state's marketplace (Covered California) to buy coverage—even using their own money. While some counties provide some care to undocumented people through their safety net systems, too many do not.ⁱ As a result, the uninsured live sicker, die younger, and are one emergency away from financial ruin—and this has health and economic impacts on whole families and communities. Our health care system and economy work better when everyone has coverage that provides access to primary and preventive care and prevents medical debt and bankruptcy.

How SB4 Works

SB4 builds on what works in the state's Medi-Cal and Covered California programs...

- SB4 expands California's well-established tradition of covering some immigrant populations in Medi-Cal who are excluded from federal programs. Examples include recent documented immigrants, including people with a "green card" for 5 years or less, and immigrants with "deferred action" status.
- By way of a Section 1332 waiver (a formal request to the federal government), SB4 would seek to allow all Californians to purchase coverage through Covered California with their own money, regardless of immigration status.ⁱⁱ All Californians, including families with mixed immigration status, will be able to make apples-to-apples comparisons between standardized health plan options, and get enrollment assistance through navigators, a website, and/or a call center.



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Key Points

No one should suffer or die from a treatable condition because of where they were born.

It's better for everyone when we treat preventable conditions early, rather than resort to emergency rooms. It doesn't reflect California's values, and it simply doesn't make sense to lock a whole population of Californians out of access to care. We have nothing to gain from letting people go bankrupt trying to pay their health bills, or letting people die from a treatable condition—just because of where they were born.

SB4 continues the momentum to help help hundreds of thousands of Californians & our whole health care system. Around 1 million of the Californians who remain without health insurance are undocumented immigrants.ⁱⁱⁱ Most of these Californians are low-income. As a result of longstanding California law, some of those who are undocumented, uninsured, and low income will be eligible to enroll in state-funded full-scope Medi-Cal (as many as 350,000-500,000) when the deportation relief programs announced by President Obama last year goes into effect. The Governor's May budget revision included funding for this population. Some people will not apply for deportation relief, and not everyone who is eligible for Medi-Cal will sign up for it. But the President's action, combined with existing California law, has the potential to help hundreds of thousands low-income, uninsured, undocumented Californians.^{iv} SB4 would be a lifeline to hundreds of thousands of Californians who, without SB4, would remain undocumented and uninsured.

Let's do the right thing, right now. Even when the new deportation relief programs are in effect, half of California's undocumented community members will be left out of the programs. That's why SB 4 is so important. It gives us the opportunity to significantly expand access to affordable health insurance, starting with children, this year. With this important first step toward Health for All, we have an opportunity to do the right thing, right now.

As the bipartisan support for SB 4 underscores, there's growing recognition that this is the right thing to do. A [poll released last fall](#) showed that a firm majority of California voters –54%– support expanding healthcare to undocumented Californians. Through SB 4, California can take a significant first step towards healing the unjust exclusion of undocumented immigrants, and set a powerful model for the nation to move forward on inclusive health access for all

More modest proposal has limited costs for a big benefit. The current proposal is a fraction of the cost of earlier proposals, and it can be capped to the money available in any given budget year. What's different since SB 4 was introduced? By June 5, the halfway point of the legislative session, the measure had been amended so that, while the expansion for all children would be guaranteed, the expansion to undocumented adults would depend on the funding allocated in the state budget. If that limit is met, a waiting list would be created. Combined with the President's executive action and the Brown Administration's recognition that the cost of restricted scope Medi-Cal is 62% of the cost of full-scope Medi-Cal, this dramatically reduces the potential cost.

The Bottom Line: Investing in immigrant families is investing in the health of our state, as immigrants are a fundamental part of our workforce and communities.

ⁱ http://www.health-access.org/images/pdfs/county_safety_net_survey_reportupdate_march15final.pdf.

ⁱⁱ Learn more here: <http://www.cbpp.org/cms/?fa=view&id=5265>.

ⁱⁱⁱ http://laborcenter.berkeley.edu/healthcare/aca_uninsured.shtml

^{iv} <http://laborcenter.berkeley.edu/health-daca-dapa/>