

47 Calif. Counties Offer Health Services to Undocumented Adults

Wednesday, September 23, 2015



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On Tuesday, the Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors voted to provide non-emergency care to local undocumented adults, joining 46 other counties in the state that do so, KQED's "[State of Health](#)" reports (Jhabvala Romero, "State of Health," KQED, 9/22).

Background

Contra Costa County stopped offering primary health care services to undocumented adults during the recession in 2009. However, the county never cut off such services for undocumented children (Artz, *San Jose Mercury News*, 9/22).

According to Health Access, a group of 35 largely rural California counties earlier this year approved plans to cover all residents regardless of immigration status. Just last week, Monterey County supervisors also voted to expand health services to undocumented individuals, according to "State of Health."

Details of County's Plan

Contra Costa County supervisors allocated \$500,000 to the one-year pilot program, called Contra Costa Cares. Three hospitals -- run by John Muir Health, Kaiser Permanente and Sutter Health -- have pledged to provide an additional \$500,000 in funding for the program.

The program -- which could launch as early as November -- will assign up to 3,000 undocumented adults to a "medical home" through a community health center. Participants will be able to access:

- Immunizations;
- Mental health services;
- A nurse advice telephone line; and
- Routine physician visits.

Reaction

Supporters of the move said that improving preventive care access for such residents will reduce emergency department visits and health care costs over time.

Supervisor John Gioia (D) said, "It will mean better health care access for all, improved public health, lower cost to our health care system, and it's just the right thing to do for people, especially undocumented adults who are not covered under the Affordable Care Act" ("State of Health," KQED, 9/22).

Health Access Executive Director Anthony Wright said, "Contra Costa is an outlier in the Bay Area, and this would go a long way to reducing that gap."

Meanwhile, Contra Costa Health Services Director William Walker said, "This allows us to enroll folks into primary care ... monitor their use over a period of time and prove the cost effectiveness of establishing such a program" (*San Jose Mercury News*, 9/22).

However, Supervisor Candace Andersen (R) -- the only person on the Contra Costa County board to vote against the program -- expressed concerns that funding for the program is unsustainable. Andersen said, "To me when you start a pilot program, you need to see where to go next, and I don't see the funding in place right now," adding, "I'm very troubled that we are having to take half a million dollars from our general fund" ("State of Health," KQED, 9/22).

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