35 Calif. Counties Expand Healthcare to Undocumented Adults

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MARTINEZ, Calif. - Dozens of California counties are expanding health care for lower-income residents as of today, no matter their immigration status. Most of the counties are in Northern California, in the Central Valley and Sierra Nevadas.

It's part of the County Medical Services Program, which is raising its maximum income levels to qualify, from 200 percent of the poverty level to 300 percent and being undocumented is not a factor.

The program includes a limited primary-care benefit so people can see a doctor three times a year and get some prescriptions covered.

Anthony Wright, executive director for the advocacy group Health Access California, says thousands of people stand to benefit.

"A year ago, there were just nine counties that provided health care services beyond emergency care to undocumented immigrants in California," says Wright. "As of Monday, there will be 47."

A new report from [Health Access California](#) details the progress made in six counties that had launched pilot programs so far.

They are Contra Costa, Fresno, Los Angeles, Monterey, Sacramento and Santa Clara counties. The report predicts even more counties will take advantage of incentives in the new Medicaid waiver to provide at least minimal health coverage, regardless of immigration status.

Contra Costa County Supervisor John Gioia says since launching its pilot program last year, about 3,000 people have been enrolled.

"This investment was good from an economic standpoint, it would reduce emergency room visits," says Gioia. "It was a benefit to everybody by improving the public health of all residents of the county, and just the morally right thing to do."

After passage of the Affordable Care Act, California cut its uninsured population in half, primarily by expanding Medi-Cal. Most of the remaining uninsured are undocumented. Just last week, the state expanded Medi-Cal to cover undocumented children. **Suzanne Potter, Public News Service - CA**