



SUMMIT UPDATE ON HEALTH ACCESS: MAY 18, 2005

Anthony Wright of Health Access continues to play a lead role in promoting access to health care in California. He identifies his priorities as "the budget, the ballot, and bills."

The Budget

Health advocates have been attending Assembly and Senate hearings on Medi-Cal Redesign proposals put forward by the Governor in his budget. Below is a summary of the Health Access Medi-Cal Redesign Scorecard, highlighting 5 items and the actions taken to date by the Senate and Assembly.

Medi-Cal Redesign Element Proposed by Governor

- * Premiums for some Medi-Cal clients.
- * Cap dental benefits to \$1000.
- * Outsource processing of some Medi-Cal "single point of entry" forms to private vendor.
- * Mandatory managed care for Medi-Cal recipients in 13 counties.
- * Restructure of hospital refinancing, which would shift risk and responsibility of reimbursements to counties.

Legislative Action as of 5/15/05

- * Rejected by the Senate and Assembly.
- * Senate and Assembly increased cap to \$1800, and added a 3-year sunset.
- * Rejected by Senate and Assembly.
- * No vote yet in Senate; some parts of proposal approved; others pending.
- * No specific proposal yet released by Governor.

All of these elements remained intact in the May Revise. Health Access maintains a Budget Process Scorecard on Medi-Cal Redesign. For updates, go to <http://www.health-access.org/preserving/docs/MediCalRedesignScorecardMay10.doc>

Interested in having your voice heard? Health Access, working with an informal network called **Budget Allies**, has drafted a statement of budget principles offers a balanced approach and opposes the spending cap (see below). Sign on at <http://www.health-access.org/preserving/signon.htm>

The Ballot

Opposing the Spending Cap Initiative

Health Access is opposing the *Live Within Our Means Act* (LWOM) sponsored by [Citizens to Save California](#) and supported by Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger. Opposing this initiative is a coalition of union, education, and health groups called Alliance for a Better California, see <http://www.allianceforabettercalifornia.com/index1.asp>

The Act, among many elements, sets a state spending limit, establishes provisions for the Governor to declare a fiscal emergency and make unilateral General Fund cuts to the budget, and reduces the Proposition 98 guarantee. For a thorough analysis of LWOM, see the [April report by The California Budget Project](#), or access the [Legislative Analyst's review of LWOM](#).

Sponsoring a Prescription Drug Reform Initiative

Health Access is sponsoring a ballot initiative titled *Cheaper Prescriptive Drugs for California*. Should Governor Schwarzenegger call a special election by June, then Health Access' initiative, called Cal Rx Plus, will be on the November 2005 ballot. If no special election is called, the initiative will be on the ballot in June 2006.

The OURx initiative is similar to AB 75 (Frommer), and would use the purchasing power of the state of California, through Medi-Cal, to negotiate better prices for up to 10 million Californians. Go to <http://www.health-access.org/providing/ourx.htm#> for more information and updates on this effort, as well as legislative efforts related to the cost and safety of prescription drugs.

There is also a countermeasure sponsored by the drug industry that will be on the same ballot. See the LAO Analysis at http://www.lao.ca.gov/2005/california_rx/california_rx_021005.htm

Legislation

An updated copy of Health Access 2005 policy priorities can be found on their website at <http://www.health-access.org/advocating/policy.htm>. Health Access continues to emphasize the 3 policy objectives identified at the Summit:

- * preserving access to care in the state and federal budgets;
- * expanding coverage by securing and building on what works in the employer-provided and public health insurance systems; and
- * increasing consumer protections for uninsured, underinsured and insured families.

Health Access is supporting many bills on coverage expansion, including one for universal coverage, as well as the bills on children's health coverage.

- * SB 840 (Kuehl), the California Health Insurance Reliability Act, (CHIRA), would provide fiscally sound, affordable health insurance coverage to all Californians, provide every Californian the right to choose his or her own physician and control health cost inflation. See <http://www.health-access.org/expanding/sb840.htm>
- * SB 437 (Escutia) and AB 772 (Chan/Frommer), which are two companion bills (identical bills in both houses), aim to expand coverage for children and are sponsored by the 100% Campaign and PICO California

Health Access is also supporting and sponsoring a range of health consumer legislation:

- * AB774 (Chan) would provide hospital patients basic consumer financial protections and protect self-pay hospital patients from being charged more than the insured.
- * AB977 (Nava) would require the Department of Insurance and the Department of Managed Health Care to review and approve out-of-pocket costs for consumers in a public process with specific standards.
- * AB1199 (Frommer), as amended, would require HMOs to give consumers a copy of their medical information record used in determining whether to cover an individual in the individual market.
- * AB1329 (Chan) would require the new Medicare prescription drug plans to be licensed and abide by California consumer protections.

See the full list of bills that Health Access supports and opposes at their website at http://www.health-access.org/advocating/2005_bills.htm