

March 27, 2020

**RE: Health4All Elders: Full-Scope Medi-Cal for Low-Income Undocumented Elders (Ages 65+)**

Dear Governor Newsom,

We, the undersigned organizations, write to respectfully request that your administration work with the legislature to expedite implementation of the Health4All Elders proposal, in light of the present COVID-19 public health emergency. This proposal, included in the Governor's proposed 2020-2021 budget, would provide full-scope Medi-Cal to an estimated 27,000 low-income undocumented seniors ages 65 and older by removing immigration status as an eligibility exclusion.

We commend the Administration's leadership in responding swiftly and responsibly to both prevent the continued spread of the coronavirus as well as prepare our state for the health care and economic impacts that are to come. The California Department of Public Health's COVID-19 resource page confirms that "some people are at higher risk of getting very sick from this illness. This includes older adults (65+)"<sup>1</sup>. Our low-income elders are especially vulnerable. Seniors are more medically fragile and face barriers that make it harder for them to access care during times of social distancing. Our undocumented seniors are even more at risk because they are excluded from many vital services altogether. There is no justification for leaving them out of comprehensive health care in the midst of this crisis. Besides humanitarian concerns, doing so will severely undermine efforts to contain the spread of COVID-19 throughout the nation.

This week, Congress passed and the President signed the Families First Act, which creates an optional state Medicaid program that provides COVID-19 testing (and testing only) that will be funded with 100 percent federal Medicaid funds. However, this will be available only to uninsured people who meet federal Medicaid's immigrant eligibility requirements. This means it will exclude huge swaths of our immigrant communities, including the undocumented in our state.

The COVID-19 pandemic makes starkly clear what we have expressed throughout the campaign for Health4All: that the health of each one of us is deeply interconnected with that of every Californian. We must recognize our shared humanity and care for each other, our neighbors, and those most vulnerable to falling through the gaps of our social safety net. Public programs should not exclude any group of people from primary and preventive care, especially when responding to a public health emergency. It is high time that our state moves toward parity in our Medi-Cal program for all who call California home.

Undocumented Californians are deeply rooted in our state and provide significant economic, familial, and cultural contributions to our communities. Almost two-thirds of undocumented Californians have lived in the U.S. for more than ten years,<sup>2</sup> and one in six of all California children have at least one undocumented parent.<sup>3</sup> Undocumented Californians also play a significant role in the workplace across industries with one in ten workers in California being undocumented.<sup>4</sup> Undocumented immigrants contribute about \$180 billion a year to our state's economy, and bring out innovation and cultural diversity through

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cdph.ca.gov/programs/cid/dcdc/pages/immunization/ncov2019.aspx>

<sup>2</sup> Pew Research Center. (2017). 5 Facts About Illegal Immigration in the U.S. Retrieved from: <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/04/27/5-facts-about-illegal-immigration-in-the-u-s/>

<sup>3</sup> Pastor, M. & Marcelli, E. (2013). USC Center for the Study of Immigrant Integration. Undocumented Californians, Immigration Reform and Our Future Together. Retrieved from: [https://dornsife.usc.edu/assets/sites/731/docs/whats\\_at\\_stake\\_for\\_the\\_state.pdf](https://dornsife.usc.edu/assets/sites/731/docs/whats_at_stake_for_the_state.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> American Immigration Council. (2017). Immigrants in California. Retrieved from <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/immigrants-in-california>

entrepreneurship.<sup>5</sup> Despite their vital place in California's social and economic fabric, undocumented and uninsured Californians live sicker, die younger, and are one emergency away from financial ruin because they are locked out of comprehensive health care.

Moments of crisis call for swift response. We should accelerate expansion of health coverage for all seniors, who are a high risk group that need timely care. Our health care system is stronger when everyone is covered. Making Medi-Cal inclusive of all Californians builds on our state's leadership in advancing universal coverage, a goal toward which the Newsom Administration has already taken significant strides.

**For these reasons, we urge you and the legislature to act immediately to expedite the investment to remove the immigration status eligibility exclusion to full-scope Medi-Cal for undocumented Californians ages 65 and older.**

If you have any questions, please contact Orville Thomas at the California Immigrant Policy Center at [othomas@caimmigrant.org](mailto:othomas@caimmigrant.org) or Ronald Coleman at Health Access California at [rcoleman@health-access.org](mailto:rcoleman@health-access.org).

Cc: The Honorable Holly Mitchell, Chair, Senate Budget Committee  
The Honorable Phil Ting, Chair, Assembly Budget Committee  
The Honorable Toni Atkins, President pro Tempore of the Senate  
The Honorable Anthony Rendon, Speaker of the Assembly

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<sup>5</sup> California Immigrant Policy Center. (2017). Resilience in an Age of Inequality: Immigrant Contributions to California. Retrieved from: <https://www.scribd.com/document/337336889/Resilience-In-An-Age-of-Inequality-Immigrant-Contributions-Report-2017-edition>