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Protecting the Affordable Care Act

As the California Legislature considers state healthcare reform in response to the Trump Administration's attacks on the Affordable Care Act (ACA), the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors unanimously approved a motion advocating for the following provisions.

- A "public insurance option" for all state residents, which would force private insurance companies to compete with a public insurance plan, ensuring that they keep their standards high;
- A mandate for all California residents to purchase health insurance, and for all employers with 50 or more employees to offer employee health coverage; and
- A "Prevention and Wellness Trust Fund" to address the root causes of preventable conditions.

The Board bifurcated the motion and voted 4-1 to also endorse exploring an "all-payer" payment system that would set prices for healthcare providers and plans in California. Such a system, which has worked well in Maryland, could limit price increases and substantially reduce administrative burdens for all healthcare stakeholders.

"I am committed to doing everything within my power to maintain the hard-fought gains we've made under the ACA in LA County, regardless of the disingenuous attempts to undermine it," said Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas, principal author of the motion. "We must act, and act decisively, to protect our residents."

“After all their efforts to repeal the ACA failed, President Trump and Congress continue to work to weaken the ACA like little ducks trying to peck it to death,” the motion’s coauthor, Board Chair Sheila Kuehl, added. “With the ACA, LA County’s uninsured rate dropped from 21 percent to 11 percent with over 1.3 million residents receiving health insurance coverage, and we are adamantly unwilling to see our progress reversed.”

The ACA also enabled 380,000 individuals to receive subsidized coverage through the state-based insurance exchange, Covered California. LA Care Health Plan offers a public insurance option for all County residents through Covered California. Its CEO, John Baackes, said, “There is no question that an L.A. Care-style public option is a viable solution to the healthcare chaos that has the nation in its grip,” Baackes said. “It would not be a matter of starting over from scratch, but rather an expansion of something that is working.”

During a recent press conference at Harbor-UCLA Medical Center, dozens of medical practitioners and health industry leaders also supported protecting the gains made through the ACA. “The expansion of insurance coverage under the ACA was a game-changer for our patients and our hospital,” noted Harbor-UCLA Medical Center chief medical officer, Anish Mahajan.

California Physicians Alliance President Dr. Stephen Tarzynski said the motion calls for “key steps toward a unified publicly financed single payer system that will cover everyone in our state.” County Public Health Director Barbara Ferrer added, “Access to quality public health services, including community disease prevention and wellness efforts, is essential to achieve healthy people in healthy communities.”

Sonya Vasquez, president of Community Health Councils, a community-based health education and policy nonprofit, said, “While we must continue to fight against federal attacks that threaten our healthcare system, we must also continue to move forward and create our own system for California that values the most vulnerable, puts care over profits, and understands the social determinants of health.”

“While the President and Congress continue to seek to sabotage our health system and take us backward, LA leaders are appropriately looking for ways to not just protect our progress, but to go forward with needed improvements,” added Joan Pirkle Smith, president of Health Access California, the statewide health care consumer advocacy coalition.

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