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National Health Care Reform Will Help Four Million Uninsured Adults and Children in California

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If leading proposals in Congress for national health care reform are enacted, most of California's 6.4 million nonelderly adults and children who were uninsured for all or part of the year in 2007 would directly benefit. The three major proposals in both the House and Senate all would make two key changes: 1) they will expand Medicaid eligibility to include qualified uninsured adults and children with household incomes up to 133% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL); and 2) they will provide public subsidies to enable qualified uninsured adults and children with household incomes from 134 – 400% FPL to purchase insurance.[1] An estimated four million Californians would be newly eligible either for public health insurance (in Medi-Cal, California's Medicaid program) or for public subsidies to purchase private coverage.

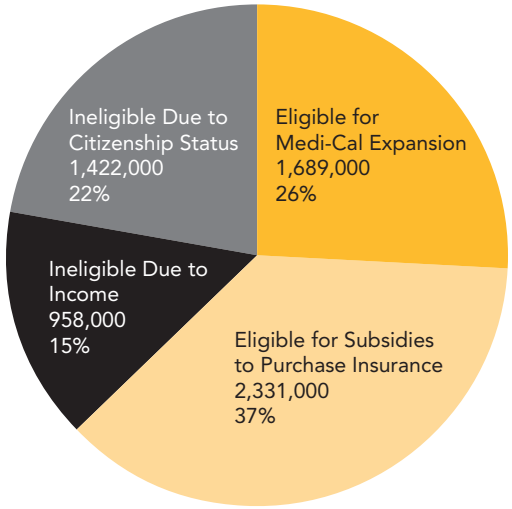
One in four uninsured nonelderly Californians (26%) would be newly eligible under the expansion of Medi-Cal, which would include all adults regardless of whether they are disabled or if there are dependent children in the family, as is currently required. Public subsidies to assist with purchasing insurance directly through a proposed health insurance exchange would help an additional 37% of uninsured adults and children gain coverage (Exhibit 1).

In Los Angeles County alone, the epicenter of uninsurance in California, 1.2 million uninsured adults and children (out of a total of 2.1 million) would be helped by national health care reform (data not shown).

1 The 2007 Federal Poverty Level was $10,787 for one person, $13, 954 for a two-person family and $16,530 for a three-person family.

The reform proposals are designed to expand coverage options for the uninsured, but the current proposals do not include the entire population. In particular, people who are not legal permanent residents, or who have green cards but have been in the U.S. for less than five years, have been excluded by legislators from receiving either public health insurance or subsidies in purchasing health insurance through a health insurance exchange.

Exhibit 1. Eligibility for Health Insurance Expansions Under Proposed National Health Care Reforms, Ages 0-64, California, 2007



Note: "Ineligible Due to Citizenship Status" for adults ages 19-64 means that they are either non-citizens without a green card, or are non-citizens with a green card who have been in the U.S. for less than five years. For children ages 0-18, "Ineligible Due to Citizenship Status" means that they are non-citizens.

Source: 2007 California Health Interview Survey

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Exhibit 2. Citizenship Status Among Adults Who Were Uninsured All or Part of the Year by Household Income as a Percent of FPL, Ages 19-64, California, 2007

	Household Income as Percent of FPL			
Adults, Uninsured All or Part Year	**<134% FPL**	**134 – 400% FPL**	**401%+ FPL**	**Total Population**
U.S. Citizens	952,000	1,604,000	817,000	3,373,000
	44%	71%	91%	63%
Non-Citizens With a Green Card	379,000	322,000	47,000	748,000
Residing in U.S. 5+ Years	18%	14%	5%	14%
Non-Citizens With a Green Card	70,000	52,000	–	134,000
Residing in U.S. <5 Years	3%	2%	–	3%
Non-Citizens Without a Green Card	758,000	286,000	21,000	1,065,000
	35%	13%	2%	20%
Total Population	2,159,000	2,264,000	897,000	5,320,000
	100%	100%	100%	100%

– = Data are unstable because of coefficient of variation above 30%.

Note: The 2007 Federal Poverty Level was $10,787 for one person, $13,954 for a two-person family and $16,530 for a three-person family.

Source: 2007 California Health Interview Survey

While the majority of non-citizen adults who have a green card have been in the U.S. for five years or more, 70,000 nonelderly legal permanent residents would be excluded from the Medi-Cal expansion, despite their qualifying low incomes (Exhibit 2). Not only are one million non-citizen adults without green cards excluded from receiving subsidies, they also would be barred from purchasing coverage through a health insurance exchange with their own money, which would shrink the risk pool and potentially stifle a well-functioning health insurance market (Exhibit 2).

Data Source

Based on data from the 2007 California Health Interview Survey, this fact sheet examines eligibility for the proposed national health insurance expansions for nonelderly adults and children ages 0-64 who were uninsured for all or part of the year. CHIS 2007 provides the most recent comprehensive information available on health insurance coverage, immigration status and household income of all Californians, both statewide and at the county level. For more information on the California Health Interview Survey, please visit *www.chis.ucla.edu*.

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