

SB 1 (Steinberg)

Health Care Coverage: Children

PURPOSE

An estimated 683,000 children in California (6.4%) currently lack health insurance coverage. Over half of these children (385,000) are already eligible for affordable health coverage through the successful Medi-Cal or Healthy Families programs but are not yet enrolled. About 87,000 children would be uninsured but are currently covered by local Children's Health Initiatives across the state; however, these programs lack stable long-term financing.

Children with health insurance are healthier, are at less risk of suffering from preventable illnesses, and have better access to needed health care services. Programs like Healthy Families and Medi-Cal improve access to and utilization of care and substantially impact children's health. To stay healthy and ensure proper development, children need ongoing preventive care, such as immunizations and screenings. Uninsured children are less likely to receive this care and often seek treatment only when conditions become serious and more expensive.

Children with health insurance perform better in school. Unhealthy children miss more school days, are less attentive, and struggle to keep up in class. Conversely, Healthy Families children showed improvements of over 60% in "paying attention" and "keeping up with school activities" as compared to their performance when uninsured.

Children's health insurance is good for the economy. In this economy, families are losing jobs and health benefits. Preventing children from losing insurance helps struggling families. Also, children's coverage benefits California's economy by bringing in federal matching funds. (California receives up to \$2 in federal matching for every \$1 the state contributes to children's coverage.)

Coverage for all children is an achievable goal that is broadly supported by the majority of Californians across the state's geographic and political spectrum.

BILL SUMMARY

This legislation would ensure that all of California's uninsured children have access to health coverage so that they may grow up healthy and strong. It would also ease the enrollment process for families and help keep children covered while they are eligible.

SB 1 would ensure all children can access affordable, comprehensive health coverage by:

- Extending eligibility for the Medi-Cal and Healthy Families programs to all children in families with income up to 300% of poverty (\$52,800 annually for a family of 3);
- Providing affordable coverage options for uninsured children in families with income over 300% of poverty; and
- Phasing in this system of children's coverage over several years and providing a smooth transition for children currently covered through the local Children's Health Initiatives into state insurance.

SB 1 would make it easier for families to enroll and keep their children covered by:

- Reducing the amount of required paperwork when applying for Healthy Families by allowing for streamlined verification of family income, consistent with recent Medi-Cal policies;
- Extending accelerated Medi-Cal enrollment for eligible children whose parents apply at county offices;
- Reinstating community-based outreach, enrollment, and retention strategies, as well as reaching out to families who are recently unemployed; and
- Improving state electronic enrollment systems to more easily connect children with available coverage.

Sponsors

100% Campaign (sponsor)
American Academy of Pediatrics (co-sponsor)
California Children's Health Initiatives (co-sponsor)
PICO-California (co-sponsor)
United Way-CA (co-sponsor)