

# COUNTY INDIGENT CARE

Welfare and Institutions Code Section 17000

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- California counties serve as the healthcare safety-net providers of last resort for uninsured residents, with county indigent care programs financed largely by state-county realignment funds (1991).
- When the Affordable Care Act expanded Medi-Cal eligibility in 2014, California passed Assembly Bill 85 to redirect a significant portion of 1991 health realignment dollars away from county indigent care programs toward other state priorities.
- This expansion allowed California to scale up Medi-Cal and reduce reliance on county indigent care programs, and it also meant that counties' caseloads were drastically reduced, leading many counties to decrease infrastructure or restructure delivery of care.
- Provisions included in H.R. 1 will narrow coverage, implement new Medicaid work requirements, increase the frequency of redeterminations, and lead to the loss of coverage for many Californians.
- California's counties will need significant new resources to rebuild the necessary infrastructure to serve an expected increased uninsured population.

## SECTION 17000 REQUIREMENTS

- Counties are legally obligated to provide subsistence medical care to lawful residents.
  - Basic, medically necessary services provided at a level which does not lead to unnecessary suffering or endanger life and health, including care sufficient to protect life, to prevent significant illness or significant disability, and to avoid substantial pain and infection. Care must be provided promptly and humanely.
- Counties are the healthcare provider of last resort for lawful uninsured residents who are low-income and lawful uninsured residents with higher incomes whose medical needs are beyond their ability to pay.
- Each county sets their own standards of eligibility, aid, and care.



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## WHAT IS NOT REQUIRED BY SECTION 17000?

- County indigent programs are not health care coverage/insurance.
- County indigent programs are not required to be uniform across the state.
- Counties are not mandated to provide care to undocumented individuals.
- This mandate does not include the provision of mental health services.

## POPULATIONS THAT MAY RETURN TO SECTION 17000 COUNTY INDIGENT PROGRAMS DUE TO RECENT POLICY CHANGES:

- Individuals who are unable to comply with new work requirements.
- Individuals who cannot afford coverage through Covered California due to the loss of federal subsidies.
- Lawfully present immigrants who are no longer eligible for Medi-Cal or Covered California.
- Individuals with pending Medi-Cal applications.

