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County will pursue health care program for remaining uninsured, to convene panel

By [Jim Johnson](#), *Monterey Herald*

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Salinas >> After hearing a presentation led by a local faith-based community advocacy organization, the Monterey County Board of Supervisors agreed on Tuesday to pursue a local program aimed at extending health care coverage to the county's remaining uninsured.

By a unanimous vote, the board set up an ad hoc committee for "countywide access to health care for all" with Supervisors Jane Parker and Simon Salinas charged with developing a plan to provide coverage and access for the estimated 30,000 uninsured in the county ineligible for Medi-Cal or subsidized private insurance because they are in the country illegally.

Parker said the Communities Organized for Relational Power in Action, or COPA, would participate with the committee to study various options for providing local coverage for the remaining uninsured, including county and community health officials and providers, and other community representatives. She said COPA requested that as part of Tuesday's "study session" led by the organization and the county health department and Natividad Medical Center.

While all the supervisors praised the concept, Supervisor John Phillips agreed with many of those backing health care for the uninsured as a "smart" and fiscally responsible initiative.

"I think we all agree that health care should be a right regardless of where you come from," Phillips said. "It's just a matter of finding a way to pay for it. Getting away from emergency care to wellness care just makes sense."

The committee is scheduled to return to the board by Nov. 15 with a report on its specific mission and timeline, and who will participate, but there is no deadline yet for developing a specific program. The board also directed Natividad Medical Center to prepare a report on various state and federal health care funding programs aimed at rewarding local health care entities for "whole person" or preventive care.

COPA requested a “health care action team” including supervisors, county health officials, COPA representatives, and other “key” health care providers and community leaders. The team would conduct an initial meeting by Nov. 15, explore county-level models for providing health care to the uninsured, and develop a proposal by March.

The organization, which has long advocated for extending health care to those in the country illegally and backed the county’s pilot program offering access to lab, radiology and drug services, provided a detailed presentation for the supervisors on Tuesday.

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During the session, the supervisors heard from uninsured residents struggling with a lack of adequate care for various maladies and their supporters, and from organizations such as the Hospital Council, state Assemblyman and county supervisor-elect Luis Alejo and Health Access on current statewide and local efforts to provide health care to the uninsured left out of the Affordable Care Act, along with the county health department and Natividad.

During public comment, Center for Community Advocacy executive director Juan Uranga advised the board to seek participation from private hospitals, health care providers and employers in the effort to cover the uninsured because local clinics were unlikely to be able to absorb additional demand.

Also Tuesday, the board heard an update on the \$78.2 million Interlake Tunnel project from the county Water Resources Agency suggesting that it will take some more time to reach an agreement with the state Department of Water Resources on a funding agreement for a \$10 million grant for the project from state legislation backed by state Sen. Bill Monning and Alejo, and that won’t be ready for board approval until next month.

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