

# *The* **Californian**

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## **UPDATE: Supes to study medically uninsured**

Jeff Mitchell, Community Health Reporting Project 4:56 p.m. PDT October 18, 2016

**BREAKING:** The Monterey County Board of Supervisors on Tuesday voted unanimously to study how it might be possible to insure the estimated 55,000 county residents who do not now have medical insurance.

Board Chairwoman Jane Parker and 3rd District Supervisor Simon Salinas will represent the board on the ad hoc committee that will also call on county administrative and medical officials as well as local community leaders and statewide insurance advocates to serve as members.

The group is expected to report back no later than Nov. 15 on the outlines of an initial campaign. An actual plan is expected to be in place by March of next year.

"We all agree that access to healthcare should be a right for everyone," said 2nd District Supervisor John Phillips. "How we pay for it is another question. I do know that we must end of the practice of getting health care through our emergency rooms."

The Monterey County Board of Supervisors will consider forming a study group next week that will be asked to find a way to cover some 55,000 county residents currently without medical insurance.

Even though a new county-financed pilot program is available to assist residents with the numerous costs, the bulk the 55,000 -- one of California's highest such populations -- continues to have no comprehensive medical coverage and continues to rely on last-resort, hyper-expensive emergency rooms for care. The pilot program helps pay for basic care, prescriptions, lab services and imaging (through Natividad Medical Center). Likewise a new Medi-Cal program is available to help provide medical coverage to those age 19 and under,

The study session is being organized to determine what next steps should be taken and is being presented by the county's Health Department, Communities Organized for Relational Power in Action (COPA); the county department of Social Services; the county Chief Administrator's Office; Natividad Medical Center; county health clinics; the federally qualified health care clinics serving the area; and Health Access, a statewide advocacy organization.

"We have been working for years to expand healthcare services in Monterey County. We began with Via Care which was a healthcare bridge leading towards the Medi-Cal expansion before the Affordable Care Act," said COPA spokesman Jesús Valenzuela. "From there, we worked with the county to expand healthcare coverage to the undocumented through the current Pilot Program that

gives the undocumented population access to certain medication, lab test, and X-ray services. We are proud to see that, in one year, we have enrolled a over 1,200 at a cost of a little over \$100,000."

Board chair Jane Parker said getting the uninsured onto a plan is critical for the well-being of all county residents regardless of their immigration status.

Dr. Gary Gray, Natividad Medical Center's chief executive officer, agreed.

"We believe that providing health care access to everyone is the right thing to do," said Gray whose own hospital is one of California's "safety-net" hospitals for poor indigents.

But, said Gray, the trick is going to be in finding a way to pay for it all.

One idea Parker said she would like to explore would be having the county's independent clinic operations -- such as Clinica de Salud del Valle de Salinas and Salud Para La Gente Health Clinic in Watsonville -- join with the county's seven clinics in offering low-cost health care insurance and care.

"The goal is to try to offer essential medical services to those that have been left out from (Affordable Care Act)," Parker said. "We want to move people into a healthcare environment and away from a disease management environment."

Parker praised the efforts of COPA and other groups that have worked in the issue.

"They're very thoughtful. They're pulling together a lot of resources to give us what I know will be a well-rounded presentation. I'm really looking forward to the discussion on Tuesday," she said.

The presentation Tuesday will provide a summary of the healthcare challenges to Monterey County's remaining uninsured indigents, existing programs and services, the remaining gaps experienced by the uninsured, and a review of the models provided by other counties to close these gaps.

The supervisors then will be asked to create a study group to figure out a way of covering the 55,000 residents -- the majority of which are believed to be undocumented -- without insurance and to report back to the board no later than April of next year.

## **IF YOU GO**

**WHAT:** Monterey County Board of Supervisors official study session on healthcare

**WHEN:** Tuesday, Oct. 18 at 1 p.m.

**WHERE:** Board Chambers at 168 W. Alisal St. Salinas.