

The Californian

COPA celebrates 15 years of work on immigration, healthcare, housing and more

By Joe Szydowski, Salinas Californian Published Oct. 1, 2018

A Central Coast nonprofit celebrated 15 years of work on housing, immigration and healthcare, including a primary-care program for undocumented immigrants, Sunday in Salinas.

More than 500 people attended the anniversary celebration of **Communities Organized for Relational**

Power in Action (COPA), a coalition of 28 organizations throughout Monterey, San Benito and Santa Cruz counties, that focuses on community engagement.

There, COPA members recounted successful efforts from recent years, such as **Esperanza Care**, a \$2 million program that provides Monterey County's undocumented immigrants with access to prescriptions and some specialists at county-run facilities, said Andrea Manzo, hub manager with Building Healthy Communities.

Soledad resident Carmen Ramírez called the program a “godsend” after her husband fell ill.

At COPA's urging, Monterey County started the program in 2015 as a \$500,000 pilot program to pay for prescriptions, Manzo said. About two years later, the county expanded it, and Natividad has picked up the tab during budgets, according to COPA.

Nonetheless, the program has a long waitlist and is limited to 3,500 members, said Jane Parker, a Monterey County supervisor who represents the Marina, Seaside and western edge of Salinas.



(Photo: Joe Szydowski)

“It’s much better, but still not where we want (it) to go,” Parker said Sunday.

About 60,000 people in Monterey County don’t have access to healthcare because they are undocumented. Many of them work in the billion-dollar agriculture industry, Manzo said.

But COPA’s event also focused on another plight of undocumented immigrants: The lack of comprehensive immigration reform.

“I don’t see anything happening in the next two months,” said Salinas’ Congressional Rep. Jimmy Panetta.

The Trump administration has also begun targeting immigrants, whether they are in the country illegally or legally, who use public assistance, he added, which would push undocumented families to forgo healthcare.

That, Panetta said, would eventually mean higher hospital bills for all when uninsured immigrants who put off seeking treatment wind up in the emergency room, unable to pay for the services they need.

For more information, call COPA at 831-728-3210.



Panelists listen to a question from Rabbi Paula Marcus during Monday's COPA immigration discussion. (Photo: Eduardo Cuevas/For the Californian)



U.S. Rep. Jimmy Panetta (D-20) spoke about immigration policy at the 15th anniversary celebration for COPA, a group that works to engage voters on immigration, health care and housing on the Central Coast. (Photo: Joe Szydlowski)