



» ITUP 29th Annual Pre-Conference:

Mobilizing to Shape Future Policy Opportunities

February 2025

Executive Summary

On February 3-4, 2025, Insure the Uninsured Project (ITUP) convened its 29th Annual Conference, ***Advancing Equity: Sustaining the Movement from Coverage to Access***. The conference focused on California’s progress toward health equity, spotlighting groundbreaking strategies to bridge the gap between health care coverage and quality access to care.

At this premier gathering of California’s most influential health leaders, experts, advocates, and community champions, ITUP continued its tradition of a pre-conference workshop entitled, *Mobilizing to Shape Future Policy Opportunities*. Throughout the workshop, over 220 participants including representatives from state and local government, policy, philanthropy, and health care delivery systems, engaged on strategies in maintaining and expanding health care access while addressing systemic inequities across California communities.

This ITUP report captures key themes from the workshop, outlining proposed advocacy messages and strategies identified by attendees to address Medicaid challenges. It also highlights community-driven strategies for workforce development and effective approaches to advocacy and policy engagement. To support ongoing efforts, the report concludes with a comprehensive set of mobilization resources, equipping stakeholders with the tools needed to drive meaningful policy change.

Participants identified the following key themes to address upcoming Medicaid challenges, community-driven solutions for workforce development, and advocacy and policy engagement strategies:

- Securing Medicaid’s Future – Tackling Policy, Network, and Sustainability Challenges
- Bridging Workforce Gaps – Leveraging Innovative Strategies and Untapped Resources
- Empowering Policy Change – Data-Driven Storytelling, Coalitions and Workforce Development

#1: Securing Medicaid’s Future – Tackling Policy, Network, and Sustainability Challenges

Facing the Future: Medicaid Expansion, Waivers, and Funding Uncertainty

- Many participants shared worried sentiments about the future of Medicaid as the federal administration is under new leadership. These unprecedented challenges at both the federal

and state levels raised major concerns over the strategy moving forward to maintain existing health care access expansions.

- Participants specifically feared potential federal block grant proposals, Medicaid work requirements, and reductions in matching funds that could dramatically undermine California's ability to serve vulnerable populations, particularly as the state already faces budget constraints and may lack resources to compensate for federal funding cuts.

Proposed Advocacy Message:

- *Medicaid expansion has improved health outcomes and reduced uncompensated care costs. Rolling back these gains would strain the health care system.*

Barriers to Care: Budget Cuts and Reimbursement Challenges

- Participants highlighted that current Medi-Cal reimbursement rates have fallen significantly below the cost of providing care, resulting in fewer providers being willing to accept Medi-Cal patients. This disparity creates health care access barriers for low-income enrollees facing extended longer wait times, extended travel time and distances for appointments, or forego needed care—ultimately contributing to health inequities and lower quality of health.
- Many participants indicated that the shortage of specialty providers that are willing to participate in Medi-Cal due to low reimbursement rates greatly impacts the health of their members. Provider shortages result in members having to travel great distances to find a provider willing to accept them. Patients with complex conditions are left with the burden of finding their own care, while simultaneously managing their conditions without timely access to specialized care. This leads to worsening health outcomes, preventable emergency department visits, delayed treatments, and increased health care disparities, particularly in rural and underserved communities.
- Participants indicated that recent and projected budget limitations threaten essential Medi-Cal services and expansion efforts, disproportionately affecting vulnerable populations including children, older adults, disabled individuals, and communities of color. These constraints risk reversing hard-won coverage gains and could result in benefit reductions, eligibility restrictions, and further service limitations for those with the greatest health care needs.

Proposed Advocacy Message:

- *Cutting Medi-Cal reimbursement rates is fiscally counterproductive. It reduces provider participation, forces patients into expensive emergency care, and ultimately increases costs. Adequate Medi-Cal funding is a smart economic investment that creates jobs, supports prevention, manages chronic conditions effectively, and preserves access for vulnerable Californians. Protecting these investments safeguards both our health care system and historic coverage gains.*

Overcoming Access Challenges, Difficulty Navigating Systems and Equity Gaps

- Many participants reiterated that when budget cuts are impending, communities of color and California's most vulnerable populations are the first to feel the impact yet take the longest to recover and recoup from the disaster.

- Complicated application processes and barriers to culturally appropriate care creates challenges for undocumented residents, LGBTQ+ communities, and access to coverage.

Proposed Advocacy Message:

- *Investing in streamlined processes and support services reduce costs, boost efficiency, and ensures coverage for vulnerable populations, preventing health disparities and ultimately lowers long-term public health expenses.*

#2: Bridging Workforce Gaps – Leveraging Innovative Strategies and Untapped Resources

California is facing a health care workforce crisis. The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated the issue as there are not enough health workers to meet the needs of its increasingly diverse, growing, and aging population. Participants shared that underserved communities experience shortages through limited educational access, credential recognition issues, and an uneven distribution of health care facilities across their regions. As Medi-Cal expansion continues, ensuring sufficient workforce levels at the local-level will be crucial to ensure the health care delivery system has the capacity to serve communities and provide high-quality care to an increased volume of patients across California. In addition, many participants stressed that success would require coordination and clear measurable metrics to position California as a model and pilot for addressing workforce needs.

Proposed Strategies:

- *Leverage existing programs like the [California Advancing and Innovating Medi-Cal \(CalAIM\) Initiative](#) to integrate workforce development with emerging technologies, alternative care models, and diversity recruitment;*
- *Utilize untapped resources such as support for undocumented workers, international medical graduates, and community programs to mitigate work shortages; and*
- *Invest in and foster the building of local partnerships and team-based trainings to secure strong allies despite federal uncertainties.*

#3: Empowering Policy Change – Data-Driven Storytelling, Coalitions and Workforce Development

Participants identified that California's health care workforce development requires a comprehensive advocacy approach that combines storytelling with data-driven analysis to highlight both human and economic impacts. Shifting the focus from coverage alone to addressing workforce and health care access issues will help strengthen and weave multi-collaborative partnerships and stakeholders together. Emphasizing the need to be proactive in health care rather than reactive through preventive health care and addressing the social determinants of health (SDoH) like broadband access, food, and transportation access etc., will be key messaging points. By building strong coalitions, engaging diverse stakeholders, and using proactive strategies, advocates can better influence policy decisions. Additionally, fostering cross-sector partnerships, establishing sustainable funding mechanisms, and enhancing workforce diversity and cultural competency will be crucial to creating a health care

ecosystem that is both effective and equitable. Clear, compelling narratives and the strategic use of media will ensure workforce development stays a priority in California's health care policy agenda.

Proposed Strategies:

- *Combine compelling personal narratives from providers and patients with economic impact data, cost-effectiveness analysis, and district-specific health care outcome;*
- *Build non-partisan coalitions with health care stakeholders and community organizations, to engage policymakers through listening sessions, district-specific data, highlighting the economic and social impact of job creation, prevention, and the value of paraprofessionals and community health workers;*
- *Utilize trusted messengers, social media influencers, and constituent voices to build public support and maintain legislator accountability;*
- *Foster partnerships across multi-sectors (i.e., health care, education, housing, and transportation) to address social determinants of health (SDoH) holistically while developing career pathways that strengthen communities and improve health outcomes;*
- *Develop innovative financing proposals combining public and private resources to create long-term sustainable funding mechanisms for workforce development initiatives; and*
- *Implement targeted recruitment and retention strategies for underrepresented populations in health care, prioritizing language access and cultural humility training to create a workforce that reflects and effectively serves California's diverse communities.*

Conclusion

The health care landscape in California faces herculean challenges in maintaining sufficient funding from federal funds to support Medicaid sustainability, developing a robust health care workforce that is reflective of the ever-changing demographic shifts, and ensuring equitable access to care for all Californians. However, through innovative solutions, strategic partnerships, and coordinated advocacy efforts, there are clear pathways forward. Success will require continued collaboration among policymakers, health care providers, community organizations, and stakeholders to implement comprehensive solutions that address both immediate needs and long-term sustainability. By leveraging California's position as a health care innovation leader and maintaining a strong focus on equity, the state can build a more resilient and accessible health care system that serves all communities effectively.

Mobilization Resources

- [CalAIM Summary and Timeline \(2022 Update\)](#)
- [CalAIM Quick Links](#)
- [Engaging with CalAIM – Quick Links for Community-Based Organizations](#)

- [Community-Based Organizations Fact Sheet](#)
- [Community Health Workers Fact Sheet](#)
- [Farmworkers 1st Issue Brief: Expanding Health Coverage for California](#)
- [Farmworkers 2nd Issue Brief: Making Medi-Cal Work for California Farmworkers](#)
- [Addressing Digital Equity for Equitable, Accessible Health Care](#)
- [Snapshot: Addressing Digital Equity for Equitable and Accessible Health Care](#)
- [California Health Care Specialty Workforce Shortages Fact Sheet](#)
- [Catalyzing AI to Advance Health Equity in California Communities](#)
- [Mobilizing Doulas: Advancing Equitable Maternal Health Outcomes in California](#)