



A Budget Investment in Community Health Navigators Is A Much-Needed Investment in Community Health

As the COVID-19 pandemic has painfully underscored, low-income essential workers and their families in communities of color are at great and disproportionate risk of devastating health problems even when simply going about the necessary tasks of daily life. Health care coverage and assistance with navigating an increasingly complex medical system can make all the difference.

Research published in October 2021 in the [Journal of the Board of Family Medicine](#) found that individuals assisted by local community-based navigators in Los Angeles County were **three times more likely to report having a primary care clinic and over two and half times more likely to report having a primary care provider** compared to the comparison group. They were also **significantly less likely to experience several barriers to care** such as not having insurance, not being able to pay for a visit, not having a usual place of care, not knowing how or where to get care and not having transportation to it. This is consistent with extensive earlier research.

Community health navigators are trusted local partners that help people overcome the multiple barriers to **applying for affordable coverage** through Medi-Cal and other health programs, including by providing culturally and linguistically competent assistance for immigrants and limited-English proficient community members. Navigators also help families complete post-enrollment tasks so they can **stay in coverage**. In addition, navigators help Medi-Cal and other enrollees **access medical care**, find doctors, keep track of, and get to medical, mental health and dental visits, obtain interpreters and translated materials, and connect with community supports to address insecurity in food, housing, personal safety, or immigration status and other social determinants of health. Navigators help the most marginalized and vulnerable populations – from low-income working families with children, grandparents and other seniors to farmworkers to people with disabilities to limited English speakers to homeless veterans to, formerly justice-involved individuals, among others — **and they do so right in the community** where people live, work, play and pray. Navigators are needed now more than ever:

- **COVID-19 and Racial Disparities:** COVID-19 continues to disproportionately harm communities of color. The underlying disparities can only be addressed by engaging people in meaningful ways, by trusted peers in the community.
- **12-month Postpartum Eligibility:** Eligible people in full scope or emergency-only Medi-Cal will miss out on this expansion, launching April 1, if they do not know to tell the county about their pregnancy. Community health navigators can not only get the word out but also allay people's concerns about why a government program needs to know their pregnancy status.
- **Eligibility Without Regard to Immigration Status for Adults 50 or Over:** Medi-Cal will also be extending eligibility to this population, starting as soon as May 2022. Community-based navigators are an essential way that these individuals, adept at remaining in the shadows, can be connected to health coverage. Pent up demand for access to medical care is another challenge that will require assistance from community-based navigators.
- **Post-Public Health Emergency Eligibility Redeterminations:** After June 30, California expects to lift the public health emergency and resume Medi-Cal eligibility redeterminations for the millions who have been able to keep their coverage under special pandemic rules. We anticipate county offices to be flooded with renewal assistance for the over 14.5 million current Medi-Cal beneficiaries. Community health navigators are essential to reaching out to families to help them get through this process without losing coverage. [Recent guidance from CMS](#) encourages states to support community organizations in these efforts.
- **Compact of Free Association (COFA) Citizens:** Since December 27, 2020, full-scope Medicaid coverage for COFA communities from the Federated States of Micronesia, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, and the Republic of Palau has been restored. Yet many Pacific Islander communities are not aware of this restoration and community-based navigators are necessary to share this important information to disproportionately-impacted COFA citizens.

Budget request: Funding for navigators assisting with Covered CA enrollments is \$6.5 million. Covered California's population of 1.6 million is dwarfed by Medi-Cal, which covers over 14 million Californians. Our organizations **request an investment of at least \$15 million general fund annually on an ongoing basis**, to be matched by a like amount in federal funds, to support essential community health navigator services.

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