

State Senate Rebuffs single-payer health plan to insure all Californians and Relieve State Budget Crunch

Written by PNHP California
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Spokespersons for Physicians for a National Health Program (PNHP)—California today decried the failure of the California state Senate to pass SB 810, the California Universal Care Act, in the current legislative session. The bill died today on the Senate floor as it became clear to its backers that they were a few votes short of passage.

The California Universal Care Act would create a single, public, statewide program to give health insurance to all Californians, much like an improved Medicare-for-All plan that has been proposed at the federal level.

“It’s time we put health care in the category of a social service that everyone needs, like our public schools and highways, instead of treating it like a commodity that only well-to-do people can afford,” said Dr. Bill Skeen, PNHP-California’s executive director. “Today’s vote is a temporary setback on the road to win quality, comprehensive and affordable health care for all.”

SB 810 would create a new California Healthcare System, which would pay the bills for health care for all Californians and be financed by progressive taxation, rather than by premium payments to private insurers.

“The system would receive money from all current sources of health care funding, public and private, to give it sufficient revenue to pay the estimated \$200 billion currently spent on health care in our state,” Skeen said. “Under the new system, Californians would be free to seek services from any medical provider. Providers remain in the private sector; only the financing of the system would change. The difference is that that all Californians would be fully covered.”

Critics claim that such as system, often referred to as “single payer,” would be too costly. Dr. Henry L. Abrons, president of PNHP California, said: “That’s simply not true. Currently the U.S. spends twice as much as any other country on health care. We have plenty of money in the system, enough to insure 100 percent of us; we just need to eliminate the administrative waste and spend our money more wisely.”

Dr. Abrons continued: “The best way to save money is to take the private insurers out of the system. They are responsible for 30 percent of each health care dollar being lost to pay for exorbitant CEO salaries, lobbyists, sales and marketing, unnecessary paperwork and shareholder profit. Medicare’s overhead, by contrast, is only 3 percent.

“A single-payer system is the only solution that provides built-in cost control,” he said. “Moving to a single-payer system would save the state of California billions and solve the state’s budget

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crisis.”

Joseph Foy, who coordinates the California Health Professional Student Alliance (CaHPSA) said, “Grassroots activists are not deterred by this setback in the Senate. The movement for single-payer health insurance is growing stronger every day.” Both CaHPSA and PNHP California are members of the statewide coalition known as the Campaign for a Healthy California. Foy said, “We’ll be working alongside our coalition partners to get our message out, especially in the districts of legislators who are not yet on board.”

The author of SB 810, Sen. Mark Leno, has promised to reintroduce the legislation in the next session. Twice before the legislation passed the Senate and the Assembly, only to be vetoed by then Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger.