

Policy At A Glance:

Health-Related Propositions on the 2026 California Ballot

Of the 14 propositions that will be on California's ballot for the Midterm Election on November 3, 2026, seven are related to health or healthcare. This brief provides an overview of the 7 propositions.

Introduction

A proposition, also known as a ballot measure, is a proposed law, constitutional amendment, or an issue presented to voters on a local or statewide ballot for decision.¹ Propositions can be initiated by citizens or by the legislature.² Ever since South Dakota first adopted citizen-initiated ballot measures in 1898, twenty-six states and the District of Columbia have adopted the citizen initiative process as a valid means to place an issue for a public vote.³ Each state has specific rules about the process of getting a measure or initiative onto the ballot, and the rules vary. Generally, a predetermined minimum number of verified signatures must be obtained by a specified deadline for the proposed measure to be placed on the ballot.

In California, the number of signatures required for ballot initiatives is tied to the number of votes cast in the preceding gubernatorial election and can vary from 5-8%, depending on the type of ballot measure.^{2,4} For the 2026 election in November, there are 14 propositions up for decision by Californian voters.^{5,6} This brief provides an overview of 7 of these propositions that are related to health or healthcare.

Types of Propositions^{1,2}

Ballot Initiatives	Proposed laws or amendments to the state constitution that are initiated by citizens
Bond Measures	Proposals to borrow money for public projects
Legislative Referrals	Constitutional amendments, state statutes, or bond measures placed on the ballot by the legislature for decision by the voters
Referendum	A measure that allows voters to approve or repeal laws passed by the legislature

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Propositions Related to Social Drivers of Health

Proposition 1: Housing Bond

Proposition 1 would authorize the state of California to sell \$11.25 billion in bonds to fund various affordable housing programs, including veteran housing, multifamily rental homes, homeownership programs, farmworker housing, affordable student housing, tribal housing, and more.^{6,7} For example, the bond is expected to help fund up to 40,000 multifamily rental units and help another 40,000 households purchase a home.⁷ Having safe, stable housing is a recognized social driver of health,⁸ and Prop. 1 aims to address this issue—especially considering the growing housing crisis and a record number of unhoused people.⁹ Prop. 1 will help build affordable homes for seniors, veterans, people with disabilities, low- and middle-income working families, vulnerable Californians and essential workers (e.g., teachers, firefighters and nurses); expand homeownership opportunities; fast-track affordable shovel-ready homes; and help those who are one crisis away from homelessness.⁶ It comes at an increased state cost of \$500 million to \$600 million annually for about 25 years to repay the housing bond.⁶ Supporters include the US Vets, CA Federation of Teachers, Self-Help for the Elderly, Habitat for Humanity CA, and CA Alliance of Child & Family Services. There are no formally registered opponents, but some Republican lawmakers criticize the measure for borrowing more money to pay for housing without addressing the underlying reasons for the housing crisis.⁷

Proposition 39: Voter ID

Proposition 39 would require voters to show government-issued identification at the polls and order election officials to verify that all registered voters are U.S. citizens.^{6,10} Voters who cast a mail-in ballot would need to write the last four digits of a government-issued ID on the envelope, raising concerns about risks for identity theft since name, address and signatures are already included on the mail-in ballots.^{6,10} Prop. 39 also requires the State Auditor to report how well the state and each county comply with the measure and make recommendations for improvement every odd-numbered year. Supporters argue that ID requirements at voting sites will strengthen voters' trust in California's election process. Opponents argue that requiring IDs will impose unnecessary barriers for eligible voters and note that this measure will disproportionately affect those with disabilities, low-income, or recent relocation.^{6,10} It also comes at a cost of \$10-100 million to the state and local government, depending on how it is implemented.⁶ Civic participation, including voting, is a social driver of health as it helps shape policies affecting health, health equity and access.¹¹ Also, a study of 44 countries (including the United States) found that voter participation was associated with better self-reported health, even after controlling for individual and country characteristics.¹² As such, it is important to encourage and facilitate voting. Supporters of Prop. 39 include The Transparency Foundation and the California Republican Party while the opponents include the American Civil Liberties Union, the California Medical Association (CMA), and the League of Women Voters of California.^{6,10}

Proposition 45: Environmental Review

Proposition 45 would amend California's landmark environmental law, California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), to expedite environmental reviews for certain projects (including most housing, transportation, water, and health projects) by setting a 365-day limit to complete environmental reviews and requiring courts to rule within 270 days on lawsuits challenging project approvals.^{6,13} Placed on the ballot by the California Chamber of Commerce, its supporters argue that CEQA is outdated and creates expensive bureaucracy and frivolous litigation that slows development. Opponents such as the Sierra Club California argue it would weaken California's environmental review law, which exists to protect people and the environment from potentially harmful developments.^{6,13}

Propositions Related to Healthcare Funding

Proposition 3: High-Income Tax

Proposition 3 would make permanent the existing 2012 voter-approved tax rates for high income Californians (individuals earning over \$371,000; joint filers earning over \$742,000) that are currently set to expire in 2031.^{6,14} The revenue collected from the tax, which typically ranges from \$5 billion to \$15 billion a year, goes to fund K-12 public schools, community colleges, and public healthcare.^{6,14} The California Teachers Association put this measure on the ballot, hoping to make permanent this vital source of revenue for education and healthcare. Other supporters include the California Medical Association (CMA). Opponents, which include the California Taxpayers Association and the Hispanic Chambers of Commerce, worry that the measure may spur wealthy Californians to leave for lower-tax states, taking jobs and revenue with them.^{6,14}

Proposition 38: Research Bond

Proposition 38 would authorize \$8.4 billion in general bonds for immunology and immunotherapy research for conditions such as cancer, heart disease, and Alzheimer's, designating half to a single University of California-affiliated nonprofit medical research institute and the other half to select public universities and nonprofits.^{6,15} Drugs created through this research would have to be discounted at 20% for Californians, and 10% of any revenue from the drugs would go back to the state general fund.^{6,15} Supporters such as the American Association of Immunologists say that this funding is needed because of funding cuts by the federal government. Opponents such as Robert Kaplan, senior scholar at Stanford, worry that it focuses on just one subset of biomedical research rather than a wider array of health research and argue that research funding should be guided through the normal budget process rather than through a ballot measure. It is projected to cost the state \$500 million to

\$600 million annually for about 20 years to repay the research bond, with some or all of the cost offset if the funded research generates revenue.^{6,15}

Proposition 40: Billionaire Tax

Proposition 40 would require the estimated 200 Californians whose net worth exceeded \$1 billion at the start of this year to pay a one-time 5% tax.^{6,16} Revenue from the tax would be used primarily for healthcare, with some reserved for food assistance and education. Service Employees International Union (SEIU) who put the measure on the ballot argues that those who would pay the tax are the ones who benefited the most financially from recent federal tax reforms while those same tax laws hurt those on Medi-Cal.^{6,16} Opponents, including Silicon Valley entrepreneurs and some health and labor organizations such as the CMA and the California Teachers Association, say the proposal will backfire, causing billionaires to leave California and decreasing tax revenue in the long run. In addition, health groups note that they were not consulted in designing the measure and that it does not solve the long-term fiscal challenges of funding healthcare.^{6,16} Of note, Prop. 40 would be nullified if Prop. 41 (which requires audits of new tax programs) or Prop. 42 (which bans new taxes on personal property) earns more votes than Prop. 40.

Proposition 44: Clinic Funding

Proposition 44 would require community clinics that serve low-income patients to spend 90% of their annual revenue on patient care.^{6,17} Also placed on the ballot by SEIU, this measure is opposed by the California Primary Care Association, CMA, and the California Hospital Association because community clinics are already heavily regulated by the state and federal governments and it would unnecessarily cost these safety-net clinics more than \$1.7 billion in financial fees in the first year, ultimately forcing clinics to significantly reduce services or close and, therefore, affecting access to care.^{6,17}

Conclusion

As the Midterm Election approaches, voters must make decisions regarding not just the political candidates running for office but also for propositions that will be on the ballot. In California, there were initially 19 ballot measures for the 2026 election, but five were withdrawn.¹⁸ Among the remaining 14 that will be on the November ballot, seven of them have some ties to health or healthcare. In thinking through the propositions, it is important to understand not only its intended consequences but also the unintended consequences. It is also important to consider who brought about the proposition and why. Voters need to fully understand and weigh the pros and cons of these proposed ballot measures to make informed decisions that will shape California's future.

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Did you know?

On average, it cost \$8.4 million to collect signatures for a ballot measure in 2024, and the most amount spent on signatures in the recent decade was \$18,815,649 for Proposition 27 (legalizing sports betting) in 2022.¹⁹



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