

Policy At A Glance:

Cultivating a Culture of Equity in Health Care (AB 133)

Assembly Bill (AB) 133 strives to establish a more equitable and prevention-focused approach to health care by transforming California's behavioral health care system, expanding Medi-Cal eligibility, supporting continued telehealth flexibilities, and advancing the state's innovative CalAIM initiative.

Introduction

In an effort to cultivate a culture of equity and quality in health care, Governor Gavin Newsom signed California Assembly Bill 133 (AB 133) into law on July 27, 2021.¹ AB 133 is a voluminous health trailer bill developed to transform and enhance the health care system in California. This policy brief will focus on AB 133's initiatives to advance more equitable and prevention-focused health care. These initiatives address the health care needs of pregnant and post-partum women, older undocumented adults, low-income individuals, and other vulnerable and marginalized groups.

Furthermore, the California legislature is making strides to transform the health care delivery system by mandating greater transparency in health care and holding health care service plans to a higher standard of care. Moreover, AB 133 aims to help Californians recover from the devastating behavioral, mental, financial, and physical impacts of the coronavirus pandemic by addressing the exacerbated health inequities.

Relevant History

- 2010** **Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA) Enacted**
This Act aimed to reduce the number of uninsured by providing affordable coverage options through Medicaid expansion and the Health Insurance Marketplaces.²
- 2013** **Health4All Campaign**
This campaign began in 2013 and aimed to expand health care to all Californians, regardless of immigration status.³
- 2021** **AB 133 Enacted**
A portion of this bill aims to advance health care in California by making it more equitable and prevention-focused.¹

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Building an Equitable Health Care System

Health Equity and Quality

Under AB 133, the Department of Managed Health Care (DMHC) will convene a Health Equity and Quality Committee that will make recommendations to the DMHC regarding standard health equity and quality measures. These measures will include annual benchmark standards for assessing equity and quality in health care delivery in California. Furthermore, healthcare service plans would be required to annually report equity and quality data and information to the DMHC. In 2025 and after, the DMHC will publish a Health Equity and Quality Compliance Report on their website. This initiative would provide greater transparency in health care and hold healthcare service plans to a higher standard of equity and quality, ensuring that patients receive more equitable and quality care that they need and deserve.¹

California Health and Human Services Data Exchange Framework

Under AB 133, California is on the path of becoming the first state to build a statewide health and human services data exchange framework. This initiative will be led by a stakeholder advisory group that will develop a common set of policies and procedures and a single data-sharing agreement that will oversee the exchange of real-time health information among health care entities and government agencies in California.⁴ County, public, and social services providers will be encouraged to connect to the data exchange network and break through silos by sharing data across entities. Since some parts of California's health care system rely on manual, decentralized, and siloed systems, this plan aims to develop a health care ecosystem that functionally enhances the patients' and providers' access to personalized, longitudinal health records.

What is the Health Professions Career Opportunity Program?

Under AB 133, the Department of Health Care Access and Information (HCAI) is required to maintain a Health Professions Career Opportunity Program that aims to support students from underrepresented regions and backgrounds to pursue health careers.⁵ This initiative includes pipeline programs that provide these students with tailored student support, career development, mentorship, and comprehensive academic enrichment. Furthermore, this program is an effort to diversify California's health care system by providing underrepresented students with the tools and skills they need to successfully pursue health careers.



Equitable Health Care: Medi-Cal, Medicare & More

Medi-Cal Eligibility Expansion

AB 133 expands Medi-Cal eligibility to the following groups:

1. Undocumented individuals who are 50 years of age or older
2. Pregnant and postpartum women: AB 133 extends the Medi-Cal postpartum care period from 60 days to 12 months without requiring a mental health diagnosis. This provision includes eligible undocumented Californians.⁶

Office of Medicare Innovation and Integration

Under AB 133, the Office of Medicare Innovation and Integration will be established to improve the integration and care coordination of Medicare and Medi-Cal benefits. Also, this initiative aims to improve access to long-term services and support (LTSS) for Medicare only individuals and dual beneficiaries, which are individuals who receive both Medi-Cal and Medicare benefits.⁷

California Advancing and Innovating Medi-Cal (CalAIM)

Under AB 133, CalAIM aims to improve health outcomes of Medi-Cal beneficiaries by focusing on whole-person care, population health, social determinants of health, and streamlined processes.⁸ To learn more about CalAIM, please refer to the [July 2021 Issue At A Glance](#).



Medi-Cal Telehealth Flexibilities

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, emergency telehealth policies were enacted to ensure that patients across California receive necessary health care services. As some of these policies reach their expiry date, AB 133 extends emergency telehealth expansion provisions until December 31, 2022.⁹ These telehealth flexibilities include, but are not limited to, the following:⁹

1. Permits delivery and reimbursement of services via telehealth modalities in the Medi-Cal program
2. Allows the Department of Finance to authorize remote patient monitoring with a separate fee schedule

Behavioral Health Provisions

A central objective of AB 133 is to transform and enhance California's behavioral health care system through infrastructure and non-infrastructure initiatives.¹⁰ To learn more about the behavioral health provisions of AB 133, please refer to the [September 2021 Policy At A Glance](#).

Conclusion

Given its innovative and transformative nature, AB 133 is a step in the right direction for the state of California. This law aims to advance the health care system in California to ensure that even the most vulnerable and marginalized groups will receive equitable and quality care. It is promising that AB 133 tries to build a better system through not only improvements to existing systems, but also through development of new systems, including pipeline programs to encourage underrepresented minorities to enter the healthcare work force. As California continues to take a step forward in improving the health of its population, more upstream and systemic approaches are needed to shape and transform California's health care system into one that is equitable for all.

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Did you know?

When thinking about equitable care, one cannot forgo the impact of structural racism and implicit bias. To this end, the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) developed a [framework](#) that highlights the importance of inclusivity, self-reflection, and community collaboration in addressing racism.¹¹



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