

Most don't want illegal immigrants in health plan, poll says

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Body

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger wants to cover illegal immigrants as part of his universal health care plan, but a new poll shows that a majority of Californians oppose that idea.

Only 37 percent of adults, and 32 percent of voters, say illegal immigrants should be included, according to the poll taken Jan. 2-6 by the Survey and Policy Research Institute at San Jose State University. However, 52 percent of adults, and 50 percent of voters, say the government should guarantee health insurance for everyone, as opposed to relying on employers or individuals to provide coverage.

The results are a mixed bag for the Republican governor, who this week unveiled a sweeping universal health care proposal. The plan would force most businesses to cover their workers or pay 4 percent of payroll into a state fund; require doctors and hospitals to pay 2 and 4 percent of their revenue to the state, in return for getting higher reimbursements for treating the poor and disabled; and mandate that insurance companies accept all customers regardless of their medical history.

The governor would also extend coverage to illegal immigrants and their children, an idea Republicans overwhelmingly reject and a majority of residents overall oppose, according to the poll. Schwarzenegger says undocumented immigrants get treatment anyway at emergency rooms, which are legally bound to provide care to everyone. He says insuring them would be far less costly.

"This is a very sensitive issue," Schwarzenegger said this week. "So what I'm trying to figure out is, how do we do it cheaper than what we are doing right now?"

People may be receptive to that argument, but the governor will have to convince them, said Philip J. Trownstine, the institute's director.

"If Schwarzenegger and the Democrats want to have mass public opinion on their side, they're going to have to make that argument widely," Trownstine said, noting that by a 2-1 ratio Californians favor granting legal residency to undocumented immigrants. "People in California are not anti-immigrant." Republicans say the plan would make the state a magnet for illegal immigrants, putting an even bigger burden on state finances.

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