

## CA health care: Premiums rising

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### Body

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July 26th, 2023 ( CalMatters — Delivered by Newstex )

It's been a mixed bag for California residents seeking health reform.

Covered California, the state's health insurance marketplace for middle-income residents, announced on Tuesday that it would increase its premiums by nearly 10% in 2024 — the highest hike since 2018 , writes CalMatters' health reporter Kristen Hwang .

Though federal pandemic aid had helped shield most Covered California enrollees from rising health care costs, Covered California's executive director Jessica Altman blamed the hike on it being a 'complicated time for health care,' given higher drug costs , rising inflation and labor shortages.

But there is some good news.

Of the 1.6 million Californians who turn to Covered California for health coverage, about 90% are eligible for federal or state financial aid, and 20% will see no change in their monthly premium, officials said. Covered California also plans to eliminate deductibles for 650,000 enrollees in 2024, and reduce out-of-pocket copays for doctor visits and prescription drugs.

Nonetheless, the rate hike is indicative of a national trend of runaway health care costs in both the private and public sectors — something that may continue to rise in the state as more people join Covered California, experts say.

A reminder: Since Medi-Cal restarted renewals after its pandemic pause, that system for the state's lowest-income residents has dropped about 225,000 Californians . Many of those no longer eligible for Medi-Cal are anticipated to enroll in Covered California, which could drive up future costs.

Christine Eibner, a senior economist at the RAND Corporation research and policy think tank: 'That population is relatively expensive. People who are lower income have more health care issues, and bringing them into the market may lead to higher premiums.'

Advocates for another health-related proposal — extending paid sick leave from three days to seven days — rallied on Tuesday in Los Angeles, reports CalMatters' politics and California Divide intern Rya Jetha .

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'Seven days is fair, and we're going to continue to push for even more than seven days later, after this,' said Sen. Lena Gonzalez , a Long Beach Democrat and author of Senate Bill 616 .

Michelle Reed, a care provider and organizer with her local Service Employees International Union, told the rally that she was forced to work during the pandemic, even though her asthma was acting up.

'My client has 15 flights of stairs I had to walk up. By the time I got up the stairs, I was out of breath and could hardly breathe, but I had to work,' Reed said, adding that the bill would help caregivers stay healthy while also keeping the recipients of their care safe. The Washington Center for Equitable Growth notes that public health experts see paid sick leave as one of the more effective tools for stopping the spread of infectious diseases.

While 150 organizations support this measure, more than 60 groups oppose it, including the state Chamber of Commerce, which placed the bill on its 2023 'job killer' list because it 'imposes new costs and leave requirements on employers of all sizes.'

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#### 1 Ojai council member finds a home

Ojai City Councilmember Suza Francina in her former home provided by a friend in Ojai on June 13, 2023. Photo by Lauren Justice for CalMatters

From CalMatters' state Capitol reporter Alexei Koseff :

After a 20-month saga that put her seat on the Ojai city council at risk , Suza Francina has finally secured a new residence within her district in the small Ventura County town.

Francina told CalMatters that she signed a lease and, over the weekend, began moving into a room in the home of an acquaintance, with a private entrance and fenced-in yard for her dogs. She has already updated her voter registration, she said, and notified the city of her new address.

'It's a huge relief not to be thinking about it all the time,' she said.

A longtime Ojai resident and three-term council member, Francina was kicked out of her rental home in November 2021 so the owner could remodel. Unable to find an affordable, dog-friendly place in her own district, she moved into a tiny room above the garage at a friend's house across town while she continued to search — eventually triggering a county grand jury investigation that concluded she was no longer eligible to serve on the city council and should be replaced ahead of the next election in 2024.

At a contentious meeting last month, the divided council voted instead to develop an ordinance that would allow a member who lost housing through no fault of their own to keep their seat until the end of the term.

Ojai officials did not respond to questions about whether Francina had reestablished residency.

She said she is grateful for a solution that will at least get her through the remaining year-and-a-half of her council term. Depending on her political ambitions, her search may then resume.

'I used to take for granted that there is always a place to live in Ojai,' she said. Now she believes the city should loosen restrictions on secondary units and develop transitional housing for a growing homeless population. She also plans to support four housing projects pending before the council.

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'It has brought home the urgency,' she said, 'that we need all kinds of affordable housing, truly affordable.'

## 2 Climate change drains Colorado River basin

A worker at the Imperial Irrigation District opens a gate on the Redwood Canal north of El Centro on June 1, 2022. Photo by Mark Henle, The Republic via Reuters

With 8 in 10 Californians polled saying climate change poses a threat to the state's economy and future quality of life, more bad news has arrived.

University of California, Los Angeles scientists have found that climate change caused the Colorado River basin to lose 10 trillion gallons of water from 2000 to 2021. That's a volume that would fill Lake Mead, one of the river's major reservoirs. About 40 million people in the West, including much of Southern California, rely on Colorado River water for much of their supplies.

Benjamin Bass, of UCLA's Center for Climate Science and lead author of the new study, in a press release : 'The fact that warming removed as much water from the basin as the size of Lake Mead itself during the recent megadrought is a wakeup call to the climate change impacts we are living today.'

The seven states that extract water from the Colorado River basin have been overdrafting it for decades so the basin's dire condition is nothing new. This led California and other states in May to reach a historic agreement to use less of the river's water.

But the study sheds new light on how much 'anthropogenic,' or human-caused, climate change is responsible for drying out the river. From 1880 to 2021, the temperature in the Colorado River basin warmed by nearly 3 degrees Fahrenheit, reducing runoff from the region's snowpack by at least 10.3%, the scientists reported.

This melting snowpack makes up a major portion — about two-thirds — of the basin's runoff water. Regions that are usually covered in snow during the winter are losing water at double the rate than snowless regions, according to the scientists. This likely indicates that instead of simply experiencing intermittent droughts, the Rocky Mountain West's climate is becoming more arid — which spells more trouble for California and other states that rely on the region for water.

California's water crisis, explained : CalMatters has a detailed look at how California might increase its water supply , and a dashboard tracking the state's water situation . There's a lesson-plan-ready version of the water explainer — especially made for teachers, libraries and community groups — as part of the CalMatters for Learning initiative.

## 3 More business for home cooks

Traci Siegel prepares a meal in the kitchen of one of her clients in Oakland on April 24, 2017. Photo by Kristopher Skinner, Bay Area News Group

From CalMatters' economic reporter Grace Gedye :

Home cooking entrepreneurs have a green light to expand.

Back in 2018, California created a legal process for home cooks to sell meals — a low-cost way to get into the food business compared to opening a restaurant or a food truck. Since then, 11 counties have authorized such microbusinesses, and over 200 businesses have officially launched, estimates Roya Bagheri, executive director for the nonprofit COOK Alliance.

The law initially limited home cooks to selling no more than 60 meals per week and \$50,000 worth of meals per year. But on Friday, Gov. Newsom signed a law that bumped those numbers up: Now people can sell 90 meals per week and up to \$100,000 worth of meals per year.

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Malcom Suggs, owner of the Smoke 'N Peppers BBQ in Chula Vista, in a statement : The law 'allows my family to expand our beloved BBQ operation to serve more people in our community. It also creates a vehicle to supplement our income, which is crucial for my family because my wife was recently laid off.'

The majority of home cooking businesses are owned by women and people of color, Baghari said. Some teach cooking classes, others host pop-up dinner parties, and some sell home-cooked meals directly to neighbors.

Before the change, Bagheri said, she heard from cooks who were hitting that cap and having to take a couple of months off to avoid running afoul of the law.

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## Jujuy: teachers and health care workers mobilize for salaries

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### Body

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**Teachers'** unions will march this Thursday, from 10 a.m., to the provincial Government House and the Ministry of Labor, **demanding that the Executive of Gerardo Morales comply with what was agreed in a joint meeting** and to convene "urgently to discuss labor and salary improvements". On the other hand, **health care workers of** the province also **joined the demands for salary increases** and **denounced the existence of "intimidation maneuvers"** against the personnel so that they sign their disaffiliation to the union.

The teachers announced the mobilization during a press conference where they **showed their "concern" about a program of the local Ministry of Education**, which seeks to "hire new teachers in a precarious manner in order to infringe on the right to strike". The proposal, according to statements made by the Minister of Education of Jujuy, **María Bovi**, arises from a request of parents in view of the strikes of the teaching sector and is linked to a "strengthening of contents in primary schools". In this regard, the general secretary of the Centro de Docentes de Enseñanza Media y Superior (Cedems), **Mercedes Sosa**, told Télam: "We consider that it is a path to labor precariousness, it generated an alert throughout the provincial education sector".

Likewise, the teacher pointed out that the measure **is one more example of everything that has been demanded against the reform of the provincial Constitution** promoted by the Morales government. "When we said that **the teachers' statute was in danger** it had to do with this. There is a parallel lane of a new way of hiring and that questions the whole teaching career. We regret that they are hired in an irregular way, because surely the pay will be different and, above all, without the labor regularizations that protect us," he pointed out. And he added: **"If there is a budget for these alternative contracts, then there is a budget to increase teachers' salaries and ensure decent working conditions"**.

**Silvia Valverde**, general secretary of the Argentine Union of Private Teachers, said that the resumption of the labor negotiations had been agreed by means of a minute for July 13, but that on that occasion "no progress was made on any salary or working conditions issue". Regarding the demands of private teachers, the union member explained to Télam: "What was signed with respect to the non-remunerative non-bonifiable item was not complied with, nor with the payment of the difference of the Christmas bonus to the subsidized schools with the new salary scale".

Last Tuesday, all of the teachers' unions of Jujuy **requested by means of a note to the Government of Jujuy the reopening of the bargaining negotiations, the formation of a negotiating table to agree on a salary increase and requested that the salary be fixed around the current basic basket**, which exceeds 230,000 pesos. In spite of this presentation, there are still no answers. In the meantime, they **maintain the strike for an indefinite period of time** to demand an increase to reach a basic salary of 100 thousand pesos and in rejection of the discounts for

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the days of stoppage. They are also demanding unpaid supplementary pay slips; for teachers with new positions since March and who have not yet been paid; for urgent labor conditions for special and arts teachers; against persecution for participating in protest actions and for warnings for taking part in assemblies.

For their part, **Jujuy health care** workers are also demanding **salary increases** from the provincial government **and denounced the existence of "intimidation maneuvers" against the personnel** so that they sign their disaffiliation to the union. "We want to be paid as they paid everyone the 200 thousand pesos, but they do not want to pay us", said the union's general secretary **Yolanda Mamaní**, who led the mobilization through the center of the capital to the Government House. The protest, according to them, is so that "no worker is paid less" than that amount, although so far they have not received any answer from the Government.

"The proposal made by the union by assembly is for the fixed part of 65 thousand pesos to be increased. Of the 20% they offered, 15% is being paid now and the other 5% in July and August", he pointed out. In spite of this, according to **Mamaní**, "It is not possible to verify the accreditations because they have withdrawn the salary receipts, a total lack of seriousness on the part of the company (Agua Potable de Jujuy S.E.) and on the part of the government". And he said about the intimidations: "They are threatening people, they are coming to see one by one the members so that they will resign from the union. It is not the first time that they do it with the intention of dissolving us".

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## Union disrupts community healthcare public hearings

Cape Argus (South Africa)/Argus Weekend (South Africa)

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### Body

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THE National Union of Public Service and Allied Workers (Nupsaw) has vowed to protest and boycott public hearings by the Department of Employment and Labour involving community healthcare workers.

The union has also received support from the South African Federation of Trade Unions (Safu), who called on its affiliated unions to show solidarity by mobilising members, officials, shop stewards, and activists for a series of protests at Department of Employment and Labour offices in the Eastern Cape, Western Cape and Gauteng.

Protests are taking place across the country at venues where the Department of Employment and Labour is conducting the public hearings.

Nupsaw is responsible for organising the majority of members of community healthcare workers employed by the Department of Health.

Nupsaw referred to the hearings as an attack on collective bargaining, as there was already an agreement concluded by the Department of Health and the Department of Employment and Labour in the Public Health and Social Development Sectoral Bargaining Council (PHSDBC), on the standardisation of remuneration of community healthcare workers.

"The Department of Employment and Labour has been playing underhanded tactics since last year December until early this year in January, when frankly asked not to proceed with its envisaged and predetermined plans to place all community healthcare workers under the Ministerial Sectoral Determination as far as their condition of employment is concerned," a Nupsaw statement said.

"We are saying away with this sectoral determination because it's going to take all the rights (away) to bargain for better working conditions of these community healthcare workers," said Nupsaw organiser Sbonile Jeza.

"Our government in particular through this Department of Employment and Labour is again driving the agenda of austerity measures.

"They don't want to pay workers who are performing a decent job like community health-care workers. So their reason is to cut the budget, to say we are going to pay you peanuts, we are going to exploit you."

In an earlier statement, Safu said: "The government is contemplating removing community healthcare workers from the PHSDBC sectoral wage agreement and placing them under the national minimum wage threshold."



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Department of Employment and Labour spokesperson Teboho Thejane said the public hearings were looking at plans for redrafting the sectoral determination and therefore roadshows were under way for inputs.

“After consultations are done and based on information at hand the determination can be made about the sectoral determination in the sector.”

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