

## CA health care: Premiums rising

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**Byline:** Lynn La

### 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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## Teamsters authorize strikes as negotiations with Republic continue in 2 markets

Waste Dive

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### Body

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#### Dive Brief:

- Leaders with the Teamsters union in two metro areas have permission from their members to initiate strikes if they cannot come to an agreement with Republic Services on labor contracts.
- Pay remains an issue for union leaders in both the Atlanta and the Phoenix areas. The Atlanta market first organized in 2003 with Teamsters Local 728, and the contract for 180 workers expires on July 31. Three Republic workplaces in the Phoenix area organized with Teamsters Local 104 over the past year and are seeking their first contract.
- Chuck Stiles, director of the Teamsters' waste division, said workers were likely to strike in Atlanta, which could lead to Republic workers in other Teamsters-organized markets in states such as Washington, California and Illinois refusing to cross the picket line.

#### Dive Insight:

These negotiations are not the first time Republic has faced labor pressure from the Teamsters, including within the Atlanta area.

Other notable examples of actions led at company locations by this union include a 2022 strike in California (which led to a successful agreement) and a 2019 strike in Massachusetts (which did not). In 2018, 120 Atlanta-area Republic drivers, helpers, mechanics and dispatchers also walked off the job to protest what they alleged were violations of federal labor law by their employer.

Then, as now, Teamsters officials called for an end to what they see as a "plantation mentality" embedded in Republic's actions.

"This is a predominantly African-American unit. The City of Atlanta, our community groups, our politicians, they will not take that," Stiles said. "These guys are not sharecroppers. We won't go from year to year and wonder how we're gonna make money."

## Teamsters authorize strikes as negotiations with Republic continue in 2 markets

In response to questions about negotiations, an unidentified spokesperson for Republic said via email that the company respected its employees' rights to engage in collective bargaining and would "continue to work toward agreements that are beneficial for our employees and our company."

Stiles, who helped organize the Atlanta workers before moving to his current national role, said Republic has not been engaging with negotiators in good faith. He said the union has already filed one unfair labor practice charge against Republic with the National Labor Relations Board and is exploring a second.

Pay structure is a key sticking point in the Atlanta negotiations, as Republic has proposed to move from an incentive-based pay structure to a flat hourly rate. According to Stiles, this means some workers could see as much as a \$30,000-per-year pay cut.

The union's counterproposal is a pay bump for workers who might benefit from the plan while keeping incentive-based pay in place. The union is also seeking to negotiate employee healthcare plans - Atlanta workers are on Republic's plan, and leaders are exploring ways to either freeze copays or ensure better copays for members.

Stiles also noted Republic has attempted to insert a "zipper clause" into the new labor contract, which he called a "non-starter." The clause would render any rights not explicitly delineated in the contract null and void, including informal benefits like Gatorade and ice for workers on hot summer days, Stiles said.

"We will not entertain that whatsoever. That is a strike issue," he said.

In Phoenix, Local 104 represents 116 workers. Josh Graves, the chapter's vice president, said Republic had been engaging in stall tactics, agreeing to meet only one or two days in a row per month compared to the seven or eight days he's seen when negotiating with companies in other industries. He also said a management rights article included in Republic's proposal was "one of the worst" he'd seen in a decade of negotiating experience.

"I think it's just a tactic to delay the negotiations, and I believe Republic's plan is trying to delay it as much as they can," Graves said. He expects Republic is hoping to wait out the clock before convincing Phoenix-area workers to decertify their union after forcing negotiations to fall through.

The union is negotiating in Phoenix for pay raises higher than Republic's proposed 15-cent per hour increase. The union also wants to get Republic workers on the Teamsters' health care plan and the Western Conference of Teamsters Pension trust.

Republic is next scheduled to meet with union leaders in Phoenix on Aug. 2 and 3. Graves pointed out that negotiations over pay and workplace conditions for drivers, mechanics and other workers are occurring in "Republic's backyard," as the company plans a new 240,000-square-foot headquarters in Phoenix.

"They could care less about their employees," Graves said. "That type of approach at the table is very disheartening when they have these employees that work really hard."

Teamsters have organized more than 9,000 Republic workers nationwide. Union officials said local chapters not currently engaged in negotiations with Republic have already informally expressed support for the workers preparing for a possible strike.

"These other guys will get pissed off when they see what they're offering us in Atlanta," Stiles said. "These folks realize, 'Hey, we've got to stay in solidarity here. We're the next guys to go.'"

The Teamsters union has indicated its willingness to take a more "militant" approach in labor negotiations under the leadership of General President Sean O'Brien, who took over the organization last year. In one of the more high-profile examples so far, the Teamsters reached a tentative contract agreement this week to avert a strike at UPS.

Teamsters authorize strikes as negotiations with Republic continue in 2 markets

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## Labor court orders medical workers to end daylong strike

The Times of Israel

July 25, 2023 Tuesday

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# THE TIMES OF ISRAEL

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### Body

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A labor court issues a ruling ordering the country's medical workers to immediately return to work and halt a one-day strike they're staging in protest of the passage a day earlier of the government's first judicial overhaul law.

However, the decision isn't set to make a difference regarding outpatient health clinics since it's issued shortly before most of them would have ended their workday anyway, and since most appointments had already been canceled.

Last night, the Israel Medical Association (IMA) announced the general strike in the healthcare system for today, in response to the Knesset's passage of the "reasonableness" law.

The strike saw the healthcare system operate on a limited Sabbath and holiday schedule. However, emergency rooms of general and psychiatric hospitals operated as usual, as did community clinics in Jerusalem and its surroundings, "due to the large number of people in the area and the complex situation there."

This morning, Health Minister Moshe Arbel and professionals in his ministry applied for an injunction to prevent "this last-minute wild strike that will unjustly hurt thousands of patients."

Hours later, Arbel appealed to the IMA to agree to end the strike at 1 p.m., but it refused.

Then, shortly before 3 p.m., the Bat Yam Labor Court accepted Arbel's request for an injunction, writing: "We believe a protest strike of two hours is sufficient to execute the right to protest, but not beyond that."

"In practice, the strike has been going on for over seven hours," it added. "We are ordering an immediate return to work for all healthcare services that were on strike today to reduce the harm to patients as much as possible."

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