

# LEGISLATIVE UPDATE



Week of February 23, 2026

## State Issues

Covered California Releases New Coverage Data

Covered California announced that despite the expiration of federal tax credits that helped millions of Americans afford health insurance, over 1.9 million Californians signed up for or renewed their insurance during the 2026 open-enrollment period.

You can find the full press release “As Enhanced Federal Subsidies Expire, Covered California Ends Open Enrollment With State Subsidies Keeping Renewals Steady — for Now — and New Signups Down,” [here](#).

The news is somewhat of a mixed bag, but it is not as concerning, as of now, as previously expected. While new enrollment is down 32 percent from last year, renewals are up 4 percent so far.

They report that total enrollment in 2026 is 1,927,371, while enrollment in 2025 was 1,979,504 – a reduction of just 50,000. While significant, it is well below the hundreds of thousands estimated last year that may stop getting Covered California coverage.

They do note that they are concerned that the total enrolled numbers may change as people drop coverage throughout the year due to financial challenges. Therefore, it is important to stay aware of any changes that are reported as the year progresses.

New Survey of Californians and the Cost of Health Care

This week, the California Health Care Foundation issued their 2026 CHCF California Health Policy Survey. You can find the full report [here](#). This year’s survey focuses largely on health care costs and Californians’ experiences affording health care. It also presents Californians’ opinions about the major federal tax and budget bill, H.R. 1, passed by Congress in the summer of 2025. Below is a sample of key findings.

Generally speaking, they found that health care costs are taking financial toll on Californians — regardless of income, with 7 in 10 Californians say health care expenses place a financial strain on their household. Unexpected medical bills now top Californians’ list of financial worries, surpassing rent, groceries, and utilities, and 4 in 10 Californians carry medical debt.

- Key Finding 1: Seven in 10 Californians feel that health care expenses place a financial strain on their household ([Figure 33 in report](#) and below).
- Key Finding 2: Nearly two in three Californians (64%), including 75% of those with low incomes and 62% with higher incomes, are worried about unexpected medical bills. In comparison, 48% are worried about rent and 47%, about groceries ([Figure 38 in report](#) and below. See Figure 39 in report for income breakdowns).

(more)

<p>New Survey of Californians and the Cost of Health Care <i>(continued)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Key Finding 3: Four in 10 Californians have medical debt, including 55% of those with low incomes and 37% with higher incomes (<a href="#">Figure 43 in report</a>). Almost half of Latinos/x and those who speak Spanish have medical debt.</li> <li>• Key Finding 4: About 6 in 10 Californians (59%), including 70% of those with low incomes and 55% of those with higher incomes, report that they or a family member skipped or delayed care due to cost in the past 12 months (<a href="#">Figures 21 – 23 in report</a>).</li> <li>• Key Finding 5: Seven in 10 Rural North respondents (69%) say their health care expenses have increased faster than their income, more than California overall (51%) and any other region (<a href="#">Figure 37 in report</a>).</li> <li>• Key Finding 6: Latino/x Californians are more likely to say it is difficult for them or their family to afford various types of health care, such as specialty and primary care, than Californians of other races/ethnicities (<a href="#">Figure 17 in report</a>).</li> <li>• Key Finding 7: More than 8 in 10 Californians (83%) say that making health care affordable is an “extremely” or “very” important priority for state policymakers in 2026 (<a href="#">Figure 7 in report</a>).</li> <li>• Key Finding 8: Forty nine percent (49%) of Californians have an unfavorable view of H.R.1, 13% hold a view, and 37% are unsure (<a href="#">Figure 1 in report</a>).</li> </ul>
<p>The State of Public Health Report</p>	<p>The California Department of Public Health (CDPH) released the State of Public Health Report this week. This is the second-ever State of Public Health Report and is authored by CA State Public Health Officer and Director of the Department of Public Health, Dr. Erica Pan.</p> <p>It describes the current public health environment and challenges, what it takes to sustain core public health functions and their impacts on our communities, and resources for data and public health actions on key population health indicators, trends, and disparities across our state. You can access the report <a href="#">here</a>.</p> <p>Public health in California encompasses a broad spectrum of activities aimed at improving the overall health and well-being of its diverse residents. Here are several of the findings of the report:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All-cause mortality, cancer death rates, and cardiovascular death rates dropped to all-time lows, and life expectancy reached an all-time high, in 2024.</li> <li>• Since 2000, death rates increased among 25- to 44-year-olds but decreased among all other age groups. This increase in deaths among younger adults was driven by behavioral health and injury-related causes, especially drug overdose.</li> <li>• Drug overdose deaths remain a leading cause of death but decreased substantially in 2024 for the first time in 14 years.</li> <li>• Pregnancy-related mortality and severe maternal morbidity rates have worsened in recent years.</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>(more)</i></p>

The State of Public Health Report  
*(continued)*

- There are important racial disparities in life expectancy, pregnancy-related mortality, and infant mortality with Black or African American populations experiencing worse outcomes compared to other groups.
- Death rates are higher in rural areas than in urban areas, and while death rates decreased in urban areas in the decade prior to the pandemic, rates increased in rural areas.
- Alzheimer’s disease and related dementias were the leading cause of death for older adults 85 and older. Death rates have more than doubled since 2000.
- Septicemia was the leading cause of hospitalization and has been increasing.
- There were nearly 12,500 cases of Valley fever in 2024, the highest year on record.

The report notes “California faces significant challenges to health and well-being due to federal funding cuts to core programs and federal policy changes that undermine public health and harm already marginalized communities. Disruptions to programs like Vaccines for Children and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP-Ed) impact state and local public health activities and could lead to reductions in outreach, staff and systems capacity, and could have long-term effects on the rates of injury, disease, and death among Californians.”

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