

# NEWS

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## Board urges responsible healthcare reform implementation

COLTON – The federal Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act could provide some benefits to San Bernardino County residents. However, the program popularly known as “Obamacare” and “Healthcare Reform”, which goes into effect in less than 10 months, remains plagued with unknowns and a potential massive drain on county resources.

That was the message from county staff today during a workshop examining the local impacts of the Affordable Care Act. Following the staff presentations, the Board of Supervisors unanimously directed staff to work with state and federal officials to implement the act with as little adverse impact to county residents and resources as possible.

Supervisors also stressed that many of the services touted as “free” under the act would actually come at great cost to taxpayers.

The intent of the Affordable Care Act is to decrease the number of uninsured Americans and reduce the overall costs of health care for the consumer through mandates, subsidies, and tax credits to employers and individuals. Additional elements are aimed at improving healthcare outcomes and streamlining the delivery of health care.

With a total population of approximately 2 million, San Bernardino County is home to about 400,000 people without health insurance in families that earn less than \$46,000 per year. Almost 100,000 of those residents are undocumented immigrants who are not eligible for coverage under the Affordable Care Act, but who the county is leagly mandated to serve.

Several county departments, acting as the Health Care Reform Steering Committee, have been working together for more than two years to evaluate the opportunities, potential risks, and possible financial impacts of not only the act, but the manner in which the state will dictate how the act is implemented at the county level.

In January 2012, the committee developed and launched ArrowCare as a way to prepare for federal healthcare reform and begin capturing federal dollars to support the county's uninsured residents. The program has provided coverage to more than 26,000 county residents to date.

The Affordable Care Act presents a number of risks to county programs for residents. Arrowhead Regional Medical Center could see an increase in patients with no insurance, including undocumented immigrants.

For the Transitional Assistance Department, the state will require a dramatic increase in the operating hours of county customer service centers, will fine the county if calls are not answered within 30 seconds, but might not provide the county with funding to increase staff at the service centers.

The County Department of Public Health could face a reduced level or elimination of federal funding for longstanding services, including support for the Ryan White program for HIV care and treatment.