



# REAL CUTS, REAL PAIN: Vital Medi-Cal Benefits Eliminated For Over 2 Million Californians

As part of a budget adopted by Governor Schwarzenegger and the California Legislature in February, ten categories of benefits were completely eliminated for adults in Medi-Cal.<sup>1</sup> The elimination of these vital benefits, described below, will reduce total Medi-Cal spending by \$258.8 million in the current fiscal year, of which half (\$129.4m) would have been paid by the federal government.

Focusing on the budget impact, however, does not adequately put into context the true impact and loss of dignity for Californians who will suffer the most when these benefits are eliminated on July 1, 2009. The benefit eliminations will significantly affect **more than two million of the lowest-income Californians** who depend on these services as their lifeline.<sup>2</sup> In almost all cases, these adults live below the poverty level (earning less than ~\$900 per month) and will be hit several times by the elimination of Medi-Cal benefits.

Description of Medi-Cal Benefit Elimination Effective July 1, 2009	Total One-Year Budget Savings (half from lost federal match)	Minimum Number of Patients Expected to be Turned Away <sup>3</sup>	Impact on the Health and Lives of Patients
<b>DENTAL CARE</b> , including routine teeth cleanings and x-rays as well as procedures such as root canals. Certain dental procedures, such as tooth extractions, which can be performed by a physician, will still be covered if the beneficiary can find a doctor who will do the procedure.	\$218,738,000	909,090	Regular dental care prevents cavities, gum disease, abscesses, and chronic pain. If dental problems are not identified and treated, adults could lose their teeth, which impact their ability to eat properly, stay healthy, or even hold a job. Abscesses and infections could lead to fevers, swelling in the jaw and glands, other health problems, or even death. In addition, loss of provider network will reduce access to dental care for children.
<b>OPTICIAN SERVICES</b> and optical lab services, which include the filling of and fittings for prescription eyeglasses and contact lenses.	\$13,571,000	485, 873	Seniors with disabilities fill 70% of their optical prescriptions through Medi-Cal, which contracts with the Prison Industry Authority to make eyeglasses at a cost of \$20 per pair. Filling prescriptions at a retail location will cost these patients hundreds of dollars for both frames and lenses.
<b>OPTOMETRY SERVICES</b> provided by an optometrist, include routine eye examinations and other preventive screenings. Some procedures will still covered, at a higher expense to Medi-Cal, when provided by an ophthalmologist.	\$1,815,000	214,522	Optometrists prescribe glasses and contact lenses, but also perform routine eye exams that screen for glaucoma, cataracts, high blood pressure, macular degeneration, and diabetes. In fact, it is recommended that diabetic patients have their eyes examined annually. Delayed or skipped screenings means that treatable illnesses may not be caught until later, when they became more expensive and harmful.



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<b>PODIATRY SERVICES</b> , which refer to the care and treatment of feet, are important in helping people remain mobile.	\$3,054,000	85,129	Podiatry services are especially important for patients with diabetes, a chronic disease that damages nerves and blood vessels in the feet and legs. Foot sores (e.g., rubbing from a shoe), ulcers, and infections could go undetected because a person lacks feeling and proper blood circulation to hasten healing. Infections that spread could eventually lead to amputation. In fact, more than half of all non-traumatic amputations occur in diabetic patients. About 15% of Medi-Cal recipients have been diagnosed with diabetes.
<b>INCONTINENCE CREAMS AND WASHES</b> , which are prescribed to help incontinent patients keep their skin clean and dry, and to avoid irritation and infection.	\$8,995,000	65,591	For people who are incontinent, wheelchair- or bed-bound, have poor leg circulation or are receiving radiation in their pelvic area, creams and washes assist with keeping their skin clean and dry, and help to protect against irritation and infection. Medi-Cal enrollees who rely on these treatments will now need to pay \$10 to \$20 for each tube or spray of cream or ointment.
<b>ACUPUNCTURE SERVICES</b> , which is the use of small needles to treat pain and other health problems, and is an important alternative to pharmaceutical treatments.	\$5,000,000	32,906	Acupuncture is used to help manage and lessen chronic pain, and can be less costly than other treatments. About 90% of Medi-Cal patients who use acupuncture services are aged, blind and disabled living below the poverty level.
<b>AUDIOLOGY SERVICES</b> , including hearing aids, and the services to screen, diagnose, and evaluate the need for hearing aids will only be limited to those performed by physicians as part of a routine exam.	\$6,176,000	28,061	In order to hear and listen to the world around them, patients will need to pay for their own audiological screenings, hearing aids, and maintenance.
<b>CHIROPRACTIC SERVICES</b> , which can help treat and lessen chronic back pain.	\$699,000	12,439	Patients will need to pay for chiropractic visits that can be extremely expensive when paid out-of-pocket.
<b>MENTAL HEALTH PSYCHOLOGY SERVICES</b> and behavioral therapy services by a psychologist (previously limited to two treatments per month), unless the patient is severely mentally ill.	\$339,000	4,970	Patients will no longer be able to see a therapist to help cope with life events, including death, divorce, employment and any range of issues. A lack of access to mental health services could have a negative effect on other areas of the health care system or the criminal justice system.
<b>SPEECH THERAPY SERVICES</b> provided by speech therapists.	\$395,000	1,593	Speech therapists help retrain patients who have had a stroke, suffer from Parkinson’s disease, multiple sclerosis or other disorders how to talk and swallow.
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$258,782,000</b>		<b>Over 2 million adults will lose coverage for 10 Medi-Cal benefits and will likely get turned away and go without care or experience hardship if they pay out-of-pocket</b>

<sup>1</sup> The 2009-10 Budget Package made changes to the California Welfare and Institutions Code section 14131.10.

<sup>2</sup> The elimination of these Medi-Cal benefits will affect Medi-Cal enrollees age 21 and over; certain groups of Medi-Cal enrollees are exempt from the benefit cut, including children and young adults under 21 receiving full-scope Medi-Cal, pregnant women if the service is part of pregnancy-related care, and individuals in licensed nursing homes or sub-acute care facilities.

<sup>3</sup> Based on data of unduplicated Medi-Cal users, by benefit, FY 2006-07 from the Department of Health Care Services.

This factsheet was prepared by Health Access, a statewide coalition of consumer, labor, ethnic, senior, faith, and other organizations that has been dedicated to achieving quality, affordable health care for all Californians for over 20 years.