



NEWS / PROFESSION

## Medi-Cal Benefits Saved Amid State Budget Cuts

COLLABORATIVE ADVOCACY HELPS SWAY GOV. NEWSOM AT 11<sup>TH</sup> HOUR

Tiffany Tuftee, LAc; Lin Yang, LAc | DIGITAL EXCLUSIVE

Governor Gavin Newsom has retracted the proposed budget cuts to the Medi-Cal acupuncture program for low-income Californians for the 2024-2025 budget year. This decision marks a significant victory for health care providers and advocates who have long championed acupuncture as a vital component of comprehensive medical care.

The initial proposal would have eliminated much-needed acupuncture benefits for millions of low-income beneficiaries. The governor faced substantial pushback from the acupuncture community, Medi-Cal beneficiaries, and legislators in both the state Senate and Assembly.

### A Little History...

Acupuncture was legalized in California in 1976 and has been an integral part of Medi-Cal healthcare since 1989. Its inclusion in the program reflects the growing acceptance and efficacy of acupuncture in treating various ailments, from chronic pain to mental health disorders. Over the decades, numerous studies have validated the therapeutic benefits of acupuncture, leading to its greater integration into mainstream medical practice.

However, this is not the first time acupuncture benefits have been threatened with cuts in the Medi-Cal program. Acupuncture was removed from Medi-Cal in 2009, but was successfully reinstated in 2016 thanks to persistent advocacy from the acupuncture community. Back then, this effort also garnered crucial support from Assembly members Phil Ting, Rob Bonta, and David Chiu.

### A Collaborative Victory

The preservation of acupuncture benefits in Medi-Cal this time is largely credited to collaborative

efforts among the acupuncture community, key legislators, and Medi-Cal beneficiaries. The six association members of the California Acupuncture Coalition (CAC) played a vital role in the effort to save Medi-Cal acupuncture services. The leaders of the American Association of Chinese Medicine and Acupuncture (AACMA) were instrumental in communicating with key legislators, convening stakeholders for budget cuts hearings, and mobilizing the public to voice opposition to the governor's plan.

The leaders of the American Korean Acupuncture Medical Association of California (AKAMAC) and the California State Oriental Medical Association (CSOMA) were essential in contacting budget committee members, initiating and promoting online petitions against budget cuts.

The leaders of the American Society of Chinese Medicine (ASCM), the Japanese Acupuncture Association of California (JAAC), and the California Acupuncture United Association (CAUA) made significant contributions to conveying our opposition to budget committee members.

Additionally, we would like to recognize teachers and students from acupuncture schools across California, including Marilyn Allen, director of the American Acupuncture Council (AAC) [and founding editor-at-large of *Acupuncture Today*] for her involvement with the schools and grassroots advocacy; the Academy of Chinese Culture & Sciences, the Acupuncture & Integrative Medicine School, Alhambra Medical University, California University-Silicon Valley, Dongguk University Los Angeles, and Five Branches University, who all joined the effort.

Furthermore, medical facilities such as North East Medical Services (NEMS) and Chinese Hospital voiced their opposition on behalf of the beneficiaries they serve.

The unified support of legislators like Senator Scott Weiner, Assemblymember Evan Low, Assemblymember Phil Ting, and Assemblymember Alex Lee directly impacted the positive outcome of the budget cuts on acupuncture. The opposition from Medi-Cal beneficiaries also underscored the importance of preserving acupuncture services.

### Heartfelt Appreciation

The California Acupuncture Coalition (CAC) extends gratitude to Governor Newsom for preserving acupuncture services in the Medi-Cal program and thanks everyone for their contributions to this achievement.

Heartfelt gratitude and applause are extended by the California Acupuncture Coalition (CAC) to Senator Scott Wiener, Senator Caroline Menjivar, and the leaders of the California Asian American and Pacific Islander Legislative Caucus (AAPILC), including Assemblymember Evan Low, Assemblymember Phil Ting, and Assemblymember Alex Lee, for their advocacy on behalf of the acupuncture community and response to the needs of low-income beneficiaries.

The California Acupuncture Coalition (CAC) commends the exemplary leadership of AACMA President Dr. Chulong Xue, Vice President Dr. Lin Yang, AKAMAC President Dr. Bon Cho, CSOMA President Tiffany Tufftee, LAc, and Executive Director Dr. Ra Adcock. Commendation also extends to Dr. Victoria Ru Tuan and Dr. Daisy Hong Liu from ASCM; JAAC President Dr. Saori Minota and Vice President Nobuko Ide; Dr. Sun Lee from AAAMA; Dr. Jane Li and Dr. Kexin Bao from CAUA; Marilyn Allen, director of the AAC Insurance Group [and Editor-at-Large of *Acupuncture Today*]; and Jessica Ho from NEMS for their significant effort and support.