



# Roll-out event set for expanded county health program for uninsured immigrants

By [Jim Johnson](#), *Monterey Herald*

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Salinas, CA- An expanded Monterey County pilot health care program has launched for local residents ineligible for government-backed coverage because they are in the country illegally.

On Wednesday, **Communities Organized for Relational Power in Action (COPA)**, the Monterey Bay Central Labor Council, and Building Healthy Communities will be joined by Supervisor Jane Parker and county Health Department director Elsa Jimenez and others at the event designed to mark the program's kick-off and explain its benefits.

The event will be held at 6 p.m. at Sacred Heart Parish Hall, 22 Stone St. in Salinas.

Parker said it makes sense for **COPA** and other community organizations to host the event because of the key role they played in arguing for the program aimed at providing basic health services for some of the estimated 62,000 local residents without access to subsidized health insurance coverage due to their immigration status.

"I really feel that it is advocacy coming from the community that has really helped the county step up to provide the services that are needed," she said.

Known as Esperanza Care, the program offers full-scope primary care and ambulatory care for up to 2,500 lower-income uninsured residents aged 19-64, including laboratory, diagnostic imaging, and limited generic drugs. The estimated \$1.8 million cost of the health coverage will be paid by county-owned safety net hospital Natividad Medical Center, along with the \$200,000 budget for administrative costs.

A third-party administrator - Pacific Health Alliance - is running the program for the county.

The program, approved by county supervisors in March, is an expansion of an earlier pilot health coverage program launched in 2015 that served an estimated 2,100 people and spent about \$180,000 for a much more limited scope of services.

Natividad CEO Dr. Gary Gray said the program “went live” last week and notices were sent to those who participated in the pilot program regarding the new program and its benefits.

The supervisors elected to fund the program through Natividad’s budget due to the county’s budget challenges, including an estimated \$53.5 million in damages from the winter storms that exacerbated Soberanes Fire impacts from the preceding summer.

On Tuesday, the supervisors will consider how to close a \$13.7 million budget gap through the first quarter of the current fiscal year as a result of Gov. Jerry Brown’s move to redirect \$5.9 million in health realignment funds for indigent medical care, as well as an Interlake Tunnel project funding “re-budget” request, unfunded Public Defender’s Office capital case defense legal costs, a Salinas homeless shelter and safe parking initiative, increased contract costs with California Forensic Medical Group to manage County Jail inmate medical care, and additional staffing positions in the Department of Social Services to cover the Office of Employment Training re-organization, and to keep animal services staff and parks rangers through the end of the year.

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