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Proposed budget a ‘real hardship’

Health cuts would be blow to working-class Latinos

Por: Leonel Sánchez 11 Enero 2011 @ 9:29 pm

California Gov. Jerry Brown’s proposed budget cuts to health programs would deeply affect the state’s large Latino population, which relies heavily on public health coverage.

“This would impact Latinos, particularly those who participate in these programs,” said Chad Silva, statewide policy analyst for the Latino Coalition for a Healthy California, a Sacramento-based advocacy group.

Latinos have high rate of labor participation but are more likely to be uninsured than any other racial or ethnic group in the United States because they often work for employers who don’t provide health insurance.

In 2008, only 41.4 percent of Latinos in California had employer-sponsored health insurance and more than one quarter, 26.6 percent, were covered by Medi-Cal or Healthy Families, both public coverage programs, according to the National Council of La Raza.

Gov. Brown on Monday released his first proposed budget, addressing a \$25.4 billion projected budget deficit over the next 18 months.

The budget now moves to the Legislature, where it will face challenges from both Republicans and Democrats. A key portion of the budget, extending tax increases, will have to be approved by voters. By law the state’s budget must be approved by July 1, but lawmakers have repeatedly missed that deadline.

The governor proposed cutting \$12.5 billion in spending, including \$1.7 billion in cuts to the Medi-Cal program and a \$1.5 billion reduction to the CalWorks program, which provides cash assistance for low-income children while helping parents find jobs.

Brown also proposed a five-year extension of temporary sales, income and vehicle license taxes, which would require statewide voter approval.

The California Budget Project, a nonpartisan Sacramento-based public policy research group that analyzed the budget after it was released, said the CalWorks proposed cut would reduce the number of families in the program from 580,000 to 458,000, a 21 percent drop.

The California Budget Project said all the proposed Medi-Cal reductions have been rejected by either the Legislature or courts in recent years and that some of the governor’s proposals would require federal approval.

Proposed Medi-Cal reductions include limiting doctor visits to 10 per year, prescriptions to six per month, placing caps on medical supplies and durable equipment, increasing co-payment to \$5 for physician, clinic and pharmacy services, all beginning in October.

Other proposed Medi-Cal cuts include imposing a \$50 copayment for emergency room visits; \$100 per day for hospital stays, for a maximum \$200; eliminating coverage for Adult Day Health Care services used by seniors and disabled people and coverage for over-the-counter cough and cold medications and nutritional supplements.

The governor also proposed significant reductions to California's Healthy Families Program, according to the California Budget Project analysis.

Proposals include increasing premiums which for certain low-income families would mean raising monthly payments for coverage from \$24 to \$42 per child and \$72 to \$126 per family, according to the budget analysis.

Silva said the governor's proposed budget did not target programs that specifically benefit recently arrived legal immigrants, which happened under the administration of former Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger.

The proposed cuts the governor announced would hurt working poor Latino families, however, particularly raising premiums and co-payments for public health coverage, he said.

"Any increase in these rates can result in hardship. It becomes the difference between getting milk or bread," Silva said.