

Dear Commissioners,

We've seen this movie before: California legislators talk about fixing the way healthcare is financed in our state. Then, instead of developing plans to enact the kind of broad reform that would dramatically improve their constituents' lives, many of those same leaders use stalling tactics. And another legislative session goes by without significant change.

As longtime advocates for healthcare reform, it's hard not to be cynical. But at this critical juncture in the history of our state and our nation, we can't afford to be cynical. The coronavirus pandemic highlights the failures and inequities of our current dysfunctional system, and the surge in unemployment exposes the cruel folly of tying healthcare access to employment. This time can, and should, be different. That's why we urge the Healthy California for All Commission to take action to address the pressing need for far-reaching healthcare reform.

The healthcare professionals, labor advocates, and community activists who make up our Healthcare for All Working Group have been monitoring the Commission's hearings and we read the Commission's first report, the Environmental Analysis of healthcare in our state, with interest. We agree with the conclusion stated repeatedly in that report: a unified financing system is critical if we're going to address the coverage gaps, inequities, and financial challenges that stem from our current disjointed system for financing healthcare.

And after years assessing the models of nations that provide universal healthcare and analyzing reports from policy experts and economists, our group has reached the conclusion that the unified financing system that will save the most money—while far more importantly, saving the most lives—is a single-payer model. We urge the Healthy California for All Commission to take concrete action to advance that goal in the months ahead.

We're certainly not alone in concluding that a single-payer solution is the best one for our state. The overwhelming majority of the public comments during the Commission's hearings have come from individuals and groups that support single-payer as strongly as we do. And several Healthy California for All Commissioners have expressed their conviction that a single-payer solution is the best way to address our state's healthcare-delivery challenges.

The Healthcare for All Working Group encourages the Commission to move beyond vague talk of "unified financing" and focus on single-payer as the most effective and economical approach for funding a universal healthcare system. There's abundant evidence showing the fiscal benefits of a single-payer model, including [the findings of researchers from UC San Francisco and UC Berkeley](#) who analyzed 22 different single-payer proposals and concluded that 19 of them would result in net savings in the first year after implementation—and all 22 would eventually save money.

We'd like to see the Healthy California for All Commission not just acknowledge that single-payer is the most promising approach for universal healthcare in our state, but to take concrete steps to make it a reality. That's why, like several of the Commissioners, including the two who voted against advancing the Environmental Analysis report, we object to the way the report emphasized obstacles to change, rather than the benefits and cost savings that would come from that change. The report was quite specific—and spent a fair amount of ink—detailing possible impediments to reform. It devoted far less space to discussing how those obstacles might be overcome. And the little it did say on that topic was vaguely worded and light on specifics. That emphasis seems self-defeating and frankly, suspect.

It is undoubtedly prudent for the Commission and our legislators to be clear-eyed about the federal and state issues that need to be tackled to achieve comprehensive healthcare reform. But once those potential impediments are identified, they shouldn't be used as an excuse for inaction, as has been the case with previous healthcare-reform efforts in our

state. Instead, the focus should shift to developing plans to overcome those possible roadblocks.

The accentuate-the-negative bias of the Commission's Environmental Analysis is evident throughout the report, particularly in Section 2. To call out just one example, there's this observation from page 81: "Despite the many flaws of existing health coverage and health care arrangements described in Section 1, people and organizations may fear losing what they have more than they value the benefits anticipated from a new and unknown system." That assertion is certainly true in some cases, but the report does not suggest ways to counteract that fear, nor does it delve into "the benefits anticipated from a new and unknown system." Those seem like major failures—ones we'd like to see the Commission address as it continues its work.

Much of what we've heard and read from the Commission impresses us—and gives us hope that it will become a force for real change. The initial section of the Environmental Analysis offers an excellent overview of the shortcomings of California's current healthcare-financing systems, and we certainly agree with the conclusion that unified financing is the only way to make substantial progress. The Commissioners are grappling with multifaceted and profoundly consequential issues, and we appreciate the integrity and rigor they're bringing to that undertaking.

As we said at the outset, as proponents of single-payer healthcare in California, we've been disappointed by what we've seen from our legislators over the years. Proposals to enact a single-payer healthcare system in our state date back to the 1940s, and each one has been sidelined. The most recent initiative, SB 562, was shelved for not being detailed enough—by a state legislature that refused to add those details.

That sort of circular illogic won't wash anymore. The majority of California's residents are demanding real reform. And the coronavirus pandemic is demonstrating how our communities are only safe when all of us have access to care.

Another reason this may be a different moment is because Governor Gavin Newsom ran for office on establishing a single-payer universal healthcare system in our state. We're hopeful the governor's Healthy California for All Commission will develop concrete plans to get us there. With the fifth-largest economy in the world, California has the resources to join other developed economies all over the globe in delivering universal healthcare to its residents. Single-payer healthcare is achievable in our state—if there is the political will. And that political will can be encouraged by a comprehensive and detailed second report from the Commission, which we hope to see by next spring.

In our view, the mission of the Healthy California for All Commission is to come up with a roadmap to achieving the universal coverage that politicians have promised us, and that Californians deserve and demand. That effort will require insight and expertise; and at times, it will require idealism and courage. We thank you for all you're doing—and will do—to improve health access and outcomes for all in our state.

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