



May 23, 2025

To: The Honorable Scott Wiener, Chair
Senate Budget and Fiscal Review Committee
ATTN: Elisa Wynne, Staff Director

The Honorable Jesse Gabriel, Chair
Assembly Budget Committee
ATTN: Christian Griffith, Chief Consultant

The Honorable Gavin Newsom, Governor
State of California
ATTN: Gudalupe Manriquez, Kris Cook, Paula Fonacier-Tang, and Megan Sabbah,
Principal Program Budget Analysts

RE: Opposition to Elimination of the Optional Adult Acupuncture Benefit in Medi-Cal

We, the undersigned, write to express our strong opposition to the Governor's 2025-26 May Revision proposal to eliminate acupuncture as an optional benefit under Medi-Cal (Issue 375). This proposal, detailed in the Department of Finance's Health and Human Services Budget Summary¹, would reduce General Fund expenditures by \$5.4 million in FY 2025-26 and \$13.1 million annually thereafter, threatening access to an essential, evidence-based health service

This is the second consecutive year this critical benefit has been targeted for elimination. Last year, thanks to the strong, bipartisan support of elected officials, stakeholders, and community advocates, acupuncture was preserved in the Medi-Cal program. We face the same challenge again this year and urge you to once again stand firm in protecting this vital service for thousands of Californians.

Acupuncture: A Proven, Cost-Effective Alternative in Addressing Pain and the Opioid Crisis

Chronic pain affects nearly 20% of Americans, according to the 2024 NIH HEAL Initiative Annual Report², underscoring the vast need for effective pain management options. With nearly 110,000 Americans dying annually from drug overdoses—most involving opioids—the demand for non-pharmacological alternatives has never been greater. Acupuncture offers a low-risk, evidence-based treatment that has been shown to reduce opioid use and improve patient outcomes.

¹ [Department of Finance 25/26 May Revision Budget Letter](#)

² [The NIH HEAL Initiative 2024 Annual Report: RESEARCH IN ACTION | NIH HEAL Initiative](#)

Recent studies reinforce acupuncture's efficacy:

- A 2024 study published in the *Annals of Internal Medicine* ³ found that 62% of patients receiving real acupuncture reduced their methadone dose by at least 20%, compared to 29% in the sham acupuncture group. This reduction is associated with a lower risk of addiction relapse.
- A 2024 meta-analysis ⁴ demonstrated that acupuncture significantly outperforms sham treatments in relieving pain and improving function in knee osteoarthritis.
- A 2024 umbrella review ⁵ confirmed acupuncture as a safe and effective therapy for low back pain, aligning with previous research advocating for its inclusion in mainstream pain management protocols.
- A large-scale 2023 individual patient data meta-analysis ⁶ of over 20,000 patients with chronic conditions—including back and neck pain, osteoarthritis, chronic headache, and shoulder pain—showed significant and sustained improvements in pain and function.

History and Equity in Access

Acupuncture was reinstated as a Medi-Cal benefit on July 1, 2016, through Senate Bill 833, expanding access to low-income Californians who cannot afford out-of-pocket treatment. The California Acupuncture Board's 2022 Sunset Review Report indicates that while 81.8% of patients pay out of pocket for acupuncture, 9.3% depend on Medi-Cal coverage.

Importantly, this benefit was also threatened during last year's 2024-25 May Revision but was ultimately preserved due to strong bipartisan support from elected officials, community advocates, and healthcare stakeholders. This broad coalition recognized acupuncture as a vital component of equitable, holistic healthcare access. Removing this benefit again would disproportionately harm vulnerable populations, widening healthcare disparities and reversing hard-fought progress.

Transformative Whole-Person Care with Enduring Results

Acupuncture champions holistic healing by addressing the interconnected physical, mental, and emotional dimensions of wellness. Unlike treatments that focus solely on symptoms, acupuncture works by stimulating the body's natural energy pathways—known as meridians—to restore balance and promote self-healing. This comprehensive approach not only alleviates pain and physical discomfort but also reduces stress, anxiety, and emotional tension, fostering

³ [Effect of Acupuncture for Methadone Reduction: A Randomized Clinical Trial: Annals of Internal Medicine: Vol 177, No 8](#)

⁴ [Acupuncture Beats Sham for Sciatica Pain](#)

⁵ [The Effectiveness of Acupuncture for Low Back Pain: An Umbrella Review and Meta-Analysis | The American Journal of Chinese Medicine](#)

⁶ [Acupuncture for Chronic Pain: Individual Patient Data Meta-analysis | Complementary and Alternative Medicine | JAMA Internal Medicine | JAMA Network](#)

overall well-being. With its minimal side effects and non-invasive nature, acupuncture stands out as a safe, natural, and empowering option.

As a compelling alternative to pharmaceutical interventions, acupuncture provides hope and meaningful relief to countless patients—especially those seeking sustainable solutions beyond medication. This integrative therapy supports the body’s innate ability to heal itself, paving the way for lasting health and improved quality of life.

Call to Action

The Administration’s renewed attempt to eliminate acupuncture disregards its proven benefits, the progress made in opioid harm reduction, and the bipartisan support that protected this benefit last year.

Eliminating acupuncture as a Medi-Cal optional benefit would be a setback for public health, disproportionately impacting those with the fewest resources.

We urge the Legislature to reject the Governor’s May Revision proposal to eliminate acupuncture as a Medi-Cal benefit and to preserve access to this essential service for Medi-Cal beneficiaries. Supporting acupuncture upholds California’s commitment to holistic, equitable, and evidence-based healthcare for all.

Sincerely,

Eddie Chan, President & CEO, North East Medical Services (NEMS)

Laura Sheckler, Director of Budget Advocacy & Strategic Policy , CPCA (California Primary Care Association) Advocates

Ying Li, President , American Association of Chinese Medicine and Acupuncture

Pedro Toledo , CEO, Petaluma Health Center

Deena Lahn, Vice President, Policy and External Affairs, San Francisco Community Clinic Consortium

Zettie D. Page, III, Chief Executive Officer, Bay Area Community Health

Sonya Tetnowski, CEO, Indian Health Center of Santa Clara Valley

L. Jina Lawler, President and CEO, Hurtt Family Health Clinic

Ellen Ahn, Chief Executive Officer, KCS Health Center (Korean Community Services)

Joanne Preece, Director of Government and External Affairs, Community Clinic Association of Los Angeles County

Dolores Alvarado, CEO, Community Health Partnership

David Anthony Becerra, Chief Executive Officer, Serve The People

Rafael Vaquerano, President and CEO , Gardner Health Services

Alexander Rossel, Chief Executive Officer, Families Together of Orange County

Tricia Nguyen, CEO, Southland Integrated Services, Inc.

Dr. Julie Tran-Olive, ND, LAc, President, CSOMA

Tamra King, CEO, Harbor Community Health Centers

Jim Mangia, President & CEO, St. John's Community Health
Daryoush Kashani , CEO, Center for Family Health and Education inc.
Mary Cummings, Chief Executive Officer, BARTZ-Altadonna Community Health Center
Anna Robert, RN, MSN, DrPH, Chief Executive Officer, Mission Neighborhood Health Center
Jack Cheng, Chief Operations Officer, Chinatown Service Center
Sparkle Barnes , Interim CEO , Health Center Partners of Southern California
Sompia Paigne, CEO, Community Medical Wellness Centers USA
Susannah Labbe, CEO, Alliance Medical Center
Brandon Thornock, Chief Executive Officer, Shasta Community Health Center
Tory Starr, CEO, Open Door Community Health Centers
Asa M. Satariano, President & CEO, Equity Health
Fernando Sanudo, CEO, Vista Community Clinic
Tammy Kim, Executive Director, Korean American Center
Lionel Yu, COO, Garfield Health Center
Jeong Im(Stella), Hong, Acupuncturist, CAM director, KCS (Korean community Services) Health Center
Peter Ng, CEO, Chinatown Service Center
Isabel Becerra, President and CEO, The Coalition of Orange County Community Health Centers
Anita Aguirre, CEO, Santa Cruz Community Health Centers
David DeLeon, Board of Director , Friends of Families Health Center
Erin Pak, CEO, Kheir Clinic
Laura I Caswell, CEO, Southern Indian Health Council
Michelle D. Gonzalez, President & CEO, TrueCare
Rakesh Patel, Ceo, Neighborhood healthcare
Genevieve Filmardirossian, Chief Executive Officer, South Central Family Health Center
Joey Espinoza-Hernandez, Director of Policy and Community Building, Los Angeles LGBT Center
Corinne Hanson, Chief Development Officer, La Maestra Family Clinic, Inc
David Brinkman, CEO, DAP Health
Lin Yang, Chair, California Acupuncture Coalition
Sarah Ross, Chief Operations Officer, Open Door Community Health Centers
Julie A. Schwab, Interim Chief Executive Officer, Imperial Beach Community Clinic
Philip Yaeger, Executive Director and CEO, Radiant Health Centers
Yu Guo , Professor of the school n, Whitewater University of California
Veronica Dela Rosa, Interim CEO, San Ysidro Health
Andrea J. Seiffertt, D.O., Medical Director of Wellness Services, West County Health Centers

cc:

Honorable Roger Niello, vice Chair, Senate Budget and Fiscal Review Committee
Honorable Anna M. Caballero, Chair, Senate Appropriations Committee
Attention: Mark McKenzie, Staff Director
Honorable Dr. Akilah Weber Pierson, Chair, Senate Budget Subcommittee No.3
Attention: Trent Garrett, Legislative Director
Attention: Cassandra Patterson, Chief of Staff
Honorable: Shannon Grove, Senate Budget Subcommittee No.3
Honorable Buffy Wicks, Chair, Assembly Appropriations Committee
Attention: Jay Dickenson, Chief Consultant
Honorable Health Flora, Vice Chair, Assembly Budget Committee
Attention: Christian Griffith, Chief Consultant
Honorable Dawn Addis, Chair, Assembly Budget Subcommittee No. 1
Honorable Caroline Menjivar, Chair, Senate Budget and Fiscal Review
Subcommittee No. 3
Attention: Scott Ogus, Health Policy Consultant
Honorable Shannon Grove, Senate Budget and Fiscal Review
Subcommittee No. 3
Honorable Robert Rivas, Speaker of the Assembly
Attention: Liz Snow, Chief of Staff
Honorable Josh Lowenthal, Speaker Pro Tempore
Attention: Brady McCathy, Chief of Staff
Honorable Senator Mike McGuire, Senate Pro Tempore
Attention: Rebecca Wachsberg
Joe Stephenshaw, Director, Department of Finance
Kim Johnson, Secretary, California Health and Human Services Agency
Corrin Buchanan, Undersecretary, California Health and Human Services Agency
Brendan McCarthy, Deputy Secretary, California Health and Human Services Agency
Samantha Lui, Deputy Secretary, California Health and Human Services Agency
Kimberly Chen, Assistant Secretary, California Health and Human Services Agency
Michelle Baass, Director, Department of Health Care Services
Tyler Sadwith, State Medicaid Director, Chief Deputy Director, Department of Health
Care Services
Lindy Harrington, Assistant State Medicaid Director, Department of Health Care Services
Erika Sperbeck, Chief Deputy Director, Department of Health Care Services
Lori Walker, Deputy Director and Chief Financial Officer, Department of Health Care
Services
Yingjia Huang, Deputy Director, Department of Health Care Services
Susan Phillip, Deputy Director, Department of Health Care Services