

TO: California Medical Association  
California Hospital Association  
California Association of Health Plans

FROM: Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin, Metz & Associates

DATE: September 8, 2011

RE: Key Findings From California Health Care Issues Survey

Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin, Metz & Associates (FM3) recently conducted a survey of California adults to measure their use of health care, attitudes toward their health coverage, and reactions to proposed health care policy changes.<sup>i</sup> The survey included a substantial over-sample of Medi-Cal enrollees, making a more detailed analysis of their attitudes on key issues possible. Among the key findings of the survey are the following:

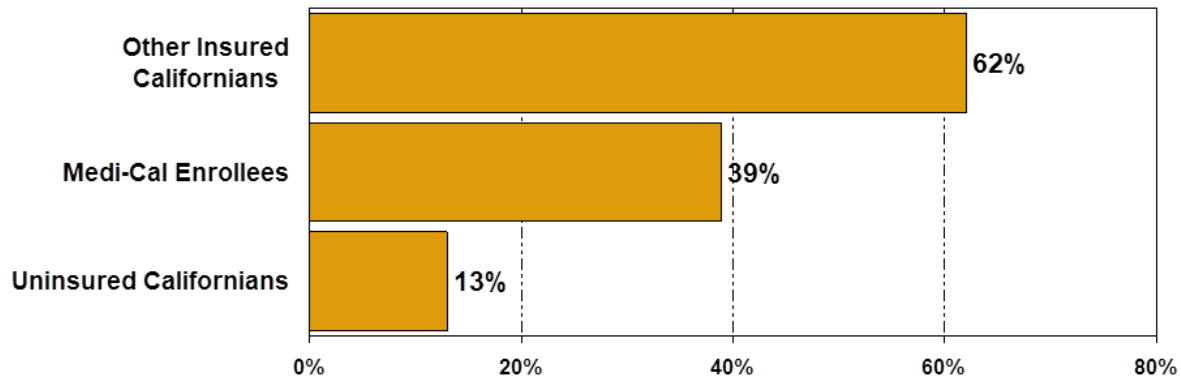
- **There are significant disparities between those who obtain insurance coverage from the Medi-Cal program and other Californians.** Medi-Cal enrollees are three times as likely to rate their own health as either “fair” or poor” as are individuals who have private health insurance, Medicare or Tricare. Medi-Cal enrollees report seeing a doctor or physician on a much more frequent basis than do other Californians, as 31 percent report having at least eight doctor visits the during the past year. And nearly one-third of Medi-Cal enrollees (31%) visited a hospital emergency room at least twice in the past 12 months – three times the rate of other Californians, regardless of health coverage status.

**FIGURE 1:  
Health Status and Use of the Health System**

<b>Condition</b>	<b>Medi-Cal Enrollees</b>	<b>Other Insured Californians</b>	<b>Uninsured Californians</b>
Rate their overall health as “fair” or “poor”	37%	12%	23%
Have seen a doctor 8+ times in past year	31%	20%	6%
Have been to a hospital emergency room 2+ times in past year	31%	10%	9%

- **Overall, Medi-Cal enrollees are less likely to say that the health system is meeting their needs than are other insured Californians.** As shown in **Figure 2** below, the survey found that just 39 percent of Medi-Cal enrollees believe that the health care system “definitely” meets their needs and those of their family. This contrasts sharply with the 62 percent of other insured Californians who hold the same belief.

**FIGURE 2:**  
**Perception That the Health Care System is “Definitely” Meeting Their Family’s Needs**



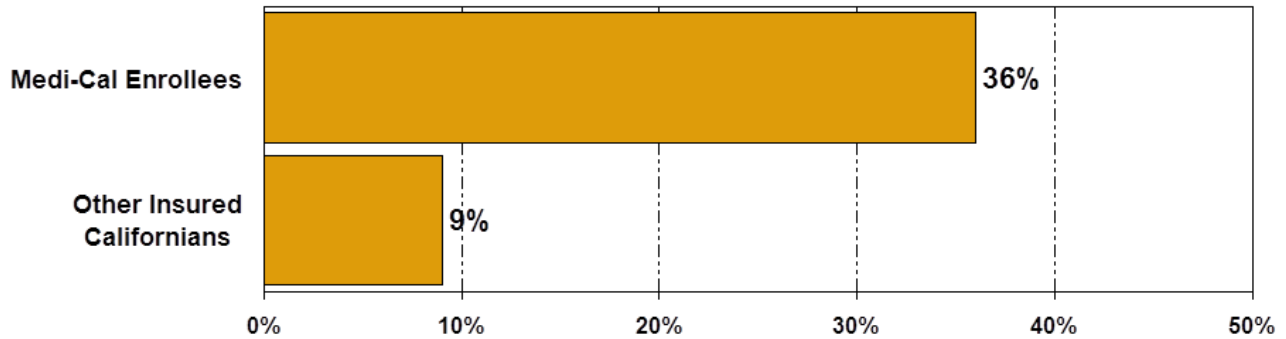
- **Medi-Cal enrollees are also less likely to report having regular access to health care.** Relative to other insured Californians, Medi-Cal enrollees are less likely to have had a physical or a preventative care visit in the past 12 months, and fewer report “always” receiving health care right away when they seek it. In addition, less than half (46 percent) of all Medi-Cal enrollees say they are “always” able to get a non-emergency doctor’s appointment within three weeks. In addition, 17 percent of Medi-Cal enrollees report going to a hospital emergency room because they could not get an appointment with a doctor or clinic, which is twice the rate among uninsured Californians and four times the rate among other insured Californians.

**FIGURE 3:**  
**Ability to Access Health Care Services**

Condition	Medi-Cal Enrollees	Other Insured Californians	Uninsured Californians
<u>Always</u> received health care right away when you thought you needed it	51%	74%	27%
Had a physical or preventative care visit in last 12 months	54%	71%	35%
<u>Always</u> got a non-emergency appointment within 3 weeks of your request	46%	67%	21%
Went to hospital ER because you could not get an appointment with a doctor or clinic	17%	4%	9%

- **Medi-Cal enrollees are far more likely than other Californians to report having been turned down by a physician who would not accept their insurance.** As detailed in **Figure 4**, the survey shows that fully 36 percent of Medi-Cal enrollees indicate that a doctor has turned them down for service because they did not take Medi-Cal. That is four times the number of privately-insured Californians who say a doctor has turned them down due to not accepting their insurance (nine percent).

**FIGURE 4:**  
**Californians Who Report Being Turned Down by a Doctor Who Did Not Accept Their Insurance**



- **Medi-Cal enrollees are also more likely than other Californians to report encountering other obstacles to getting the care they need.** As shown in **Figure 5**, nearly half (47 percent) of all Medi-Cal enrollees want to increase their access to health care services. However, the survey results show that when compared to other insured Californians, Medi-Cal enrollees are twice as likely to be limited in choosing a doctor because of their type of health care coverage. Medi-Cal enrollees are also more often denied access to a doctor because their physician is not taking new patients.

**FIGURE 5:**  
**Barriers to Seeing a Doctor**

Condition	Medi-Cal Enrollees	Other Insured Californians	Uninsured Californians
Would like to see a doctor or visit a clinic more frequently to stay healthy or obtain care when sick	47%	19%	67%
Say their type of insurance coverage limited their choice of doctors	42%	19%	42%
Say their doctor was not taking new patients	26%	13%	21%
Say there are no doctors close to where they live	26%	10%	12%

The survey also found that distance is a major barrier, as twice as many Medi-Cal enrollees report not having a doctor in their community. In fact, the leading reason Medi-Cal enrollees volunteer for not visiting a doctor or clinic as often as they would like is not having a health care provider nearby. Considering that Medi-Cal enrollees are more likely to reside in households earning less than \$30,000 per year and are more likely to be unemployed, the impact of proximity to a doctor’s office or clinic should not be dismissed at a time when gas prices remain at near-record highs.

- **Many Medi-Cal enrollees indicate that requirements for increased payments would make them less likely to seek care.** Specifically, as shown in **Figure 6**, the survey shows that implementing a \$5 charge per visit to a doctor or clinic would result in four-in-ten Medi-Cal enrollees (39 percent) visiting their health care provider less often. Charging \$50 per hospital emergency room visit would result in nearly one-quarter (23 percent) of Medi-Cal enrollees not seeking emergency room health care. An additional 20 percent would continue to seek emergency room care, but would refuse to pay the \$50 charge.

**FIGURE 6:  
Impact of Proposed New Fees on Medi-Cal Enrollees**

<b>Impact of \$5 co-pay on frequency of visiting doctor or clinic</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Impact of \$50 payment per visit to a hospital emergency room</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Go less often	39%	Would not seek care	23%
Go same amount	52%	Would seek care, but refuse to pay	20%
Go more often	7%	Would seek care and pay	52%
Don’t Know/NA	2%	Don’t Know/NA	5%

Taken together, the findings of this survey indicate that many Medi-Cal enrollees are dissatisfied with their access to the health system. Compared to other Californians, a greater number of Medi-Cal enrollees report facing health problems; fewer report great satisfaction with the way the health system is meeting their needs; and more say they would like to see doctors more frequently than they do. Medi-Cal enrollees are more likely than other Californians to seek medical care, but less likely to say that they were able to get access to care in a timely fashion; perhaps as a result, enrollees report much higher rates of emergency room utilization. In this context, it is perhaps not surprising that substantial numbers of enrollees indicate they will be less likely to seek care if new fees are established for visits to doctors or emergency rooms.

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<sup>i</sup> **Survey Methodology:** From August 20-29, 2011, Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin, Metz & Associates (FM3) conducted a random-digit-dial (RDD) telephone survey of 763 California residents conducted both on landlines and cell phones. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish. The sample consisted of 363 interviews with Californians who receive health coverage through Medi-Cal, and 400 who receive it from other sources. Results have been statistically weighted to reflect the true proportion of Californians covered through Medi-Cal. The margin of sampling error for the full sample is +/-4.4 percent at the 95 percent confidence level; for the sub-sample of Medi-Cal enrollees it is +/-5.1 percent.