HEALTH & WELFARE | DAILY REPORT

Doctors decry emergency room cut

March 9, 2011 | **Christina Jewett**

Andrew Bain/Flickr

A relatively small cut in the grand scheme of the California budget is creating a significant stir among emergency room doctors.

Last week, lawmakers voted to eliminate a $55 million fund that's used to pay for care to uninsured patients who wind up in emergency rooms. Whether emergency rooms get the money or not, **they are mandated by federal law** to render basic treatment to all patients who come with a medical emergency.

To help fund such care, a "Maddy Fund" was set up in about 50 counties, comprised of fines collected for certain traffic violations.

The budget committee **approved moving that money** into the general Medi-Cal funding pot, where it would be matched, dollar for dollar, with federal funds. The logic behind the cut is the notion that a **recently approved federal waiver** will expand care to the uninsured, **according to the budget document**.

But the waiver **only expands care to 500,000 [PDF]** uninsured Californians, according to the Department of Health Care Services.

That still leaves about 6.5 million people without emergency care coverage, said Dr. Peter Sokolove, president-elect of the California chapter of the American College of Emergency Physicians.

He said the fund is best set aside for emergency care, which is already strained.

Sokolove said emergency rooms already stand to see a major impact from past and pending budget cuts that slash payments and create holes in the mental healthcare safety net. Additionally, he said a proposed **cap on primary care visits** may result in greater emergency room pressure.

"There are many emergency rooms hanging on by a shoe string, and these funds are critical to keep them open," Sokolove said.

Sokolove said the funds are particularly helpful in assuring that specialized doctors such as ophthalmologists and neurologists agree to be "on call" to see emergency room patients.

"At many community hospitals, it's difficult to get a specialist to see a patient when they need their services," said Sokolove, who is also an emergency room physician at UC Davis Medical Center.

And **a recent study** shows that one in five patients who seek care at a California emergency room leave without being seen by medical professionals. Patients were half as likely as average to be seen at hospitals widely considered to comprise the "safety net" – teaching hospitals, county hospitals and trauma centers.

The study noted that patients seeking care in affluent areas are more likely to get it. The findings showed that as household income in the area near the ER went up by $10,000, so did the number of patients who received care.

The Maddy Fund cut, though, would affect people regardless of income, Sokolove said. He said the cuts could reverse a **trend that hospitals worked hard to achieve** – a reduction in hours of "diversion," or times when

Christina Jewett
Health and Welfare Repo
E-mail | Tel: 916-504-408
201
Bio

My Priorities: Health care costs a quality; state oversight of health ar welfare systems; elder care; medica devices.

EXPLORE FURTHER

NEWS POST

**Medi-Cal cap co
devastating for t**

ambulances are turned away from overcrowded emergency rooms. And if emergency rooms close, he said, "it really affects everybody."

Recommend   **1**

DONATE NOW   *Like our content? Help us do more.*

Filed under: Health & Welfare, Daily Report
Tags: budget, emergency room, hospitals

Comments

Comments are closed for this story.

Live

No items at this time...

via Twitter

Live

Health Access CA
RT @**JewettCW**: California   **ER** docs decry budget cuts, saying wait times could grow & specialists could disappear - **http://ow.ly/4bcHw   ca** ...
11 Months Ago from **Twitter**

California Watch
California   **ER** docs decry   **cabudget** cuts, saying wait times could grow & specialists could disappear - **http://ow.ly/4bcHw** by @**JewettCW**
11 Months Ago from **Twitter**

SDCMS
RT @**californiawatch** Doctors decry emergency room cut | California Watch **http://bit.ly/fjertx**
11 Months Ago from **Twitter**

Mission Urgent Care
Urgent Care News: Doctors decry emergency room cut **http://bit.ly/dElTnc**
11 Months Ago from **Twitter**

---

advocates say

RECENT POSTS

In Marin County, poverty exists alo...
wealth

Researchers to examine revamp of...
health

Southern Californians at risk of dea...
air pollution, EPA says

Prime Healthcare drops bid for N.J...
hospital

Poor, minority residents face most...
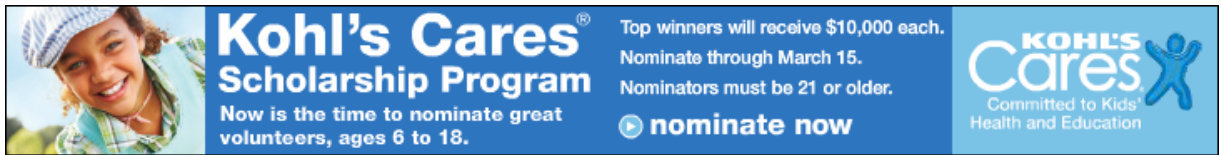risks with climate change

POPULAR TAGS

attorney general Barry Bonds bud...
California Lost campaign finan...
demographics earthqua...
education reform Election 2010 gov...
race high-speed rail immigration J...
Brown lead marijuana medic...
**Meg Whitman On Shaky...
Ground** On Shaky Ground fol...
Prime Healthcare prisons
public schools scho...
seismic safety steroids
m...

Topics

Home
Health & Welfare
K–12
Higher Ed
Money & Politics
Environment
Public Safety

Our Content

Spotlight
Daily Report
React & Act
Help Us Report
Data Center
Inside the Newsroom
Archive
Report an Error

Who We Are

About
Our Team
Our Funders
Press Room
Privacy Policy

Partner With Us

California Watch Media Network
Use Our Content / Logo
Employment / Internships
Donate
Advertise

"Journalism Innovation," W
Society of Professional
Journalists, 2011

"Explanatory Journalism,"
Winner
Society of Professional
Journalists, 2011

"Best Online-Only Website,"
Winner
National Headliner Award,

"Investigative Reporting," W
Society of Professional
Journalists, 2010

development: **Happy Snowman Tech** / de