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New Report from Advancement Project California Reveals Ongoing Racial Disparity in Health Coverage and Access for Californians

Despite significant gains, low-income people of color across California counties still face considerable barriers, study finds

LOS ANGELES, CA –Today, Advancement Project California, USC PERE, PICO California and California CALLS released a new report that analyzes health care access trends in Los Angeles County, Riverside County, and Merced County. The report finds that, despite considerable progress made in health coverage, access, and outcomes during the early years of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) implementation, people of color in California continue to face disproportionate obstacles to accessing quality health care.

“Californians’ universal right to quality health care access is under threat,” said Daniel Wherley, senior analyst at Advancement Project California. This report gives a 3D view of how the ACA improved health for many in our state but – as our data shows – could not alone reverse stubborn health disparities that continue to hurt low-income people of color across the state. California’s advocates and elected officials now have an opportunity before them: to take the lessons of the ACA and collectively move us toward a state of true health equity.”

Key findings from *Health Care Access* include:

- Black, Latino and Indigenous Californians continue to struggle with health care access disparities after ACA implementation;
- The ACA helped increase capacity at community health centers allowing them to treat more patients – who are predominantly people of color;
- Improved health care access was important in driving down the rate of preventable hospital stays across almost all groups, but even this improved performance was unable to reverse the stark disparities in this measure;

- Individual county choices regarding their individual safety net programs are fundamental in any statewide pursuit of health equity.

Health Care Access: Securing the Counties' Health Care Safety Net for All Residents is part of RACE COUNTS (www.RACECOUNTS.org), a first-of-its kind initiative from Advancement Project California and its partners that paints a comprehensive picture of racial disparity in California, ranking all 58 counties by seven issue areas critical to California's future. According to the report, people of color in California are routinely denied basic health care services due to lack of physical access, cost, provider shortages, lack of culturally appropriate care, and immigration status.

"At a time of increasing racial and economic polarization in our country, *Health Care Access* affirms the importance of ensuring that quality, affordable, and accessible health care is available to every Californian," said Joseph Tomás McKellar, Co-Director of PICO California. "The findings in this report shed necessary light on the reality that health access is fundamentally an issue of racial justice. If we are going to grow closer together instead of further apart along racial lines, we must secure pathways to equitable access to healthcare and prevention for all."

Case studies in Los Angeles County, Riverside County and Merced County that examine post-ACA changes reveal lessons learned in each region and opportunities to reduce disparities and increase access. The report is accompanied by an interactive online tool (www.RACECOUNTS.org/HealthCareAccess) which provides a visual analysis of how health care trends have changed over time in each focus county.

"As we continue to push back the attacks on our healthcare system and encourage our state and county leaders to continue to move forward, the Health Care Access report reinforces the need for such work," said Sonya Vasquez, chief program officer of Community Health Councils. "While we have made great gains in California and certainly in Los Angeles County, we still have high rates of preventable chronic diseases, individuals with coverage but limited or no access to a provider, and many who are simply locked out of the system all together. This report is a valuable tool in our ongoing efforts."

Key findings include:

- Los Angeles County served nearly 300,000 additional patients through community health center sites and the rate of uninsured adults dropped to historic lows during the ACA years. However, racial disparities in coverage and preventable hospitalizations persisted.
- Merced County's safety net capacity did not accelerate at the pace needed to keep up with the 34,000 residents who gained coverage via Medi-Cal expansion.
- Low-income residents in Riverside County delay needed care due to the lack of affordable, accessible transportation particularly in rural areas.

“Community health organizations are filling a vital need in Riverside County by providing affordable, high quality, and culturally competent care to many of our most vulnerable residents,” said Vernita Todd, senior vice-president of external affairs of Health Care Partners of Southern California. “Adequate investments in community health clinics can help close gaps in access in a County that is as large and diverse as Riverside.”

In regions throughout the state, local health advocates are working with government officials who have demonstrated the leadership to take on the challenge of removing barriers to health care access and prioritizing their safety net network with health clinics and centers for all Californians. RACE COUNTS calls for a focus on systems improvement efforts at the county level to increase the pipeline of culturally and linguistically competent health care professionals to ensure better care for local communities and support for residents and advocates across the state who are working together to create standardization and minimum coverage for California.

“This important report highlights the struggles Merced faces in securing healthcare access for all,” said Isai Palma, civic engagement coordinator of Building Healthy Communities Merced. “Merced County lacks not only the necessary resources for adequate health care in our community, but also the leadership needed to address this issue and prioritize the lives of so many vulnerable residents across our county. Health Care Access will help illuminate these challenges while making Merced communities rise for all.”

To download the report and use the interactive, visit www.RACECOUNTS.org/HealthCareAccess.

About RACE COUNTS

RACE COUNTS is a first-of-its-kind initiative that paints a comprehensive picture of racial disparity in California’s 58 counties across seven issue areas critical to California’s future. The interactive online tool measures counties in the context of performance, disparity and impact to tell the real story of racial disparity in the state. Using rigorous research and analysis, RACE COUNTS ranks each county in seven key issue areas: democracy, economic opportunity, safety and justice, access to health care, healthy built environments, education and housing. The RACE COUNTS initiative seeks to equip community organizers and governmental leaders in their work toward improving public safety, economy, health and governance in California. Visit www.RACECOUNTS.org to learn more.

About Advancement Project California

Advancement Project is a next generation, multiracial civil rights organization. In California, the organization champions the struggle for greater equity and opportunity for all, fostering upward mobility in communities most impacted by economic and racial injustice. Advancement Project California builds alliances and trust, uses data-driven policy solutions, creates innovative tools, and works alongside communities to ignite social transformation. For more information, visit www.advancementprojectca.org. On Twitter [@AP_California](https://twitter.com/AP_California).