

SB 770: The History, a Victory, and the Challenge Ahead

Impetus. Last Fall, leaders of groups affiliated with the Healthy California Now coalition ([HCN](#)) were discussing two ongoing imperatives: the need to engage the governor in the cause and the need to recruit a broader range of key groups into the single-payer movement (e.g., labor unions, BIPOC communities, healthcare reform advocates, small and medium businesses).

Strategic use of the Commission report. The coalition turned to the report released months earlier by the governor's Healthy California for All Commission after two years of study and discussion. While the final report was not as explicit as hoped for, it produced valuable corroboration that single payer would save vast sums of money and thousands of lives. The report also promoted the actionable idea of ground-laying talks between state and federal officials to clarify the potential for federal funding and define permissible design elements for a California-based universal healthcare system.

A bill is born. Coalition leaders saw such talks as a strategic way to engage the governor and build more political support for single payer, both key to our success. The idea came up to use a bill to create momentum for the talks and to form a "waiver development workgroup" from diverse groups to consult in the process. Sen. Scott Wiener (D-SF) and Sen. Mike McGuire (D-Healdsburg, Senate majority leader and recently named 2024 Senate president) agreed to author the bill. The title of SB 770, "Unified Health Care Financing", echoed the term the Commission had used, which included single payer.

Amendments and passage. The bill was introduced in February and passed committee and floor votes in both the Senate and Assembly with ongoing lobbying from HCN coalition groups. Insurance and pharmaceutical industry reps testified and actively lobbied against it. (Among the criteria for a new healthcare system, the bill cited, "Prohibition on the kinds of risk-bearing contractual arrangements that could incentivize providers to withhold needed care, while allowing for payment models that guarantee access, promote quality, ensure equity, and enable multidisciplinary teams."). As it neared passage, authors accepted amendments that emerged from the governor's already overextended health agency. It was decided to forgo the formal waiver working group as an overly bureaucratic and costly feature, while maintaining a robust stakeholder

engagement process that the HCN coalition will be leading. The timeline for reporting on the discussions was also extended. Final floor votes in the Assembly and Senate were 47-15 and 29-9 respectively. Read the final version of the bill [here](#).

Following through. We have always known that single payer as a way to guarantee universal health care is rock solid policy—and that overcoming political obstacles is our primary challenge. An important intent of SB 770 is to motivate players in the political arena to support the cause which we have valiantly defended for so long. The coalition will lead in this process as it unfolds, inviting engagement from historic single-payer advocates and recruiting new organizations and activists to produce an unstoppable movement.

The passage of SB 770 is a significant victory for guaranteed universal health care in California. We have much to celebrate and much work to do!

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