

# The Modesto Bee



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## Access is crucial in any health care reform

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The entrance to the emergency department at Memorial Medical Center in Modesto. Andy Alfaro [aalfaro@modbee.com](mailto:aalfaro@modbee.com)



The entrance to the emergency room at Doctors Medical Center File The Modesto Bee

There are tremendous unknowns that lie ahead in 2017 with the arrival of a new administration and Congressional delegation in Washington, D.C. From the

perspective of health care leaders and a family business that has served this region's agricultural economy for generations, there is a critical priority that must remain – an assurance that Californians will continue to have access to safe and affordable health care coverage.

As the most populous state in the nation, California has reaped enormous benefits from recent health care reform. With the federal government as its partner, California has expanded access to affordable, high-quality, medically necessary health care programs and services to approximately 3.7 million children, seniors and individuals from working families.

Imagine what that means to a family who previously could not afford preventative care, routine examinations and medications.

With coverage, parents rest easier knowing their families

have access to life-saving care when needed. Children receive regular checkups and screening to detect and manage or prevent chronic conditions. They can receive proper medications and immunizations to prevent or treat illness. They stay in school and learn and grow.

Adults, many of whom had never received medical attention before, are able to receive proactive, preventive care to manage conditions like high blood pressure or high cholesterol. This expanded coverage means healthier communities and a more productive workforce.

For older Californians, it has meant a stronger safety net to create a healthy and happier lifestyle. It has helped reduce dependence on expensive emergency rooms and encourage prevention of disease and chronic conditions.

In Stanislaus and San Joaquin counties, health care reform has allowed more than 150,000 residents to enroll in Medi-Cal, California's version of Medicaid, for the first time. Roughly half are children.

Funding available from Washington D.C. has helped facilities like Memorial and Doctors medical centers in Modesto, Oak Valley District Hospital and Stanislaus Surgical Hospital to serve the needs of their communities.

In short, California is on a strong path forward to help the state's economy and quality of life for everyone by promoting greater health, stronger school attendance and less job absenteeism. The most vulnerable among us, the vast majority children, are getting access to the care they need.

As policy discussions in Washington D.C. continue, let's work together with our community leaders and state and federal officials to do what's best for our neighbors. If changes are needed, let's be sure they are carefully considered with a thorough and complete plan so that no one falls through the cracks.

The political and human cost of failing to do so would be enormous.

As the presidential transition continues, we believe our local federal representatives in Congress share our goals of ensuring people have access to coverage and care. We have made enormous progress in California to serve the best interest of the public, patients and health care providers. We recognize the Affordable Care Act should be fixed, and believe the best solution reflects the fact that expanding access to health

care for our most vulnerable residents will always be a worthwhile goal that makes Modesto, and the Golden State, strong.

*Daryn Kumar is CEO of Memorial Medical Center. Gary West is President and CEO of JS West. They wrote this for The Modesto Bee.*