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Protecting access to care will benefit families throughout California

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As we approach Inauguration Day 2017, the start of the Trump administration and a new congressional session, the only clear prediction is that significant change is looming. We don't know what form that change will take. But as lawmakers begin their deliberations on important public policy priorities, we want to emphasize an important one of our own.

As CEO of Redlands Community Hospital and president and CEO of the Inland Empire Economic Partnership, we believe it is critical to continue to ensure Californians will have access to safe and affordable health care.

With a diverse population of more than 39 million people, California has benefited greatly from the recent federal health care reform law. According to figures from the

Department of Health Care Services, an estimated 3.7 million children, seniors and individuals in low-income working families have been provided the opportunity to gain health care coverage, which had been out of reach for them before.

This means a great deal to working families who finally have access to important preventative care, routine examinations and medications. Parents are more at ease knowing their children have access to life-saving care.

Preventative care is helping their children stay healthy, raising school attendance and nurturing knowledge in a generation that will one day lead our state and country.

Many adults, who once had trouble finding health coverage because of conditions like high blood

pressure, asthma and diabetes, are finally receiving the care and access to the treatment they need. They are able to use less sick days, leading to a more productive workforce that is growing our economy.

For California seniors, expanded health coverage provides a stronger safety net of care, creating a healthier and happier lifestyle. Reducing dependence on emergency rooms should be a goal, along with creating more opportunities to stop preventable diseases and chronic conditions.

In San Bernardino County, more than 234,000 residents, the majority of them children, are part of the group of Californians now able to receive health coverage through Medi-Cal. Facilities like Redlands Community Hospital are better able to serve their communities.

By promoting greater health, stronger school attendance and less job absenteeism, we are shaping a more robust California that is providing a greater quality of life. This is the right path.

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.

As the transition to a new administration continues, we believe our representatives in Congress share our goals of ensuring access to coverage and care for Californians. We have made tremendous strides to serve the best interest of the public, patients and health care providers.

Expanding access to health care for our most vulnerable residents is a worthy cause that makes California strong.

James R. Holmes, president and CEO of Redlands Community Hospital and Paul Granillo is president and CEO of the Inland Empire Economic Partnership.