Media Clips

COVERED CALIFORNIA BOARD CLIPS

September 3, 2026 – October 19, 2026

Since our last board meeting, the media coverage includes:

- Dr. Ilan Shapiro's article highlighting the importance of enrolling through Covered California's Special-Enrollment Period.
- Covered California's Health Summit event in Los Angeles with community partners talking about the efforts to educate the LPI community about changes for 2027.
- Effects of reduced subsidies and policy changes on patients, hospitals, and California communities.
- Rising numbers of uninsured patients for the 2027 coverage year.
- Decline in ACA enrollment nationwide amidst rising costs.
- The federal government's claims of millions of fraudulent ACA enrollees.
- California gubernatorial candidates' proposals in terms of healthcare ahead of the November election.
- Major parties continue to weigh affordability options, particularly around healthcare, ahead of midterm elections.
- Covered California's announcement of Sonia Fernandes as New Assistant General Counsel.
- Covered California's announcement of Mary Watanabe as New Chief Deputy Executive Director, External Outreach and Strategy

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Articles of Significance

California health insurance costs skyrocketed 45% as national rankings paint grim picture
California Post.....October 16, 2026

Covered California Open Enrollment Begins November 1: What to Know for 2027
NBC Palm Springs.....October 15, 2026

Obamacare Enrollment Fell to 20.5 Million People as of June, KFF Says
Reuters.....October 14, 2026

US government cuts subsidies for 189,000 Obamacare enrollees
Reuters.....October 14, 2026

ACA enrollment drops across five Central Valley congressional districts in 2026
The Business Journal.....October 14, 2026

Covered California for Small Business Announces Rate Change
Contra Costa News.....October 14, 2026

Preparing for the flu season
News 11.....October 13, 2026

Californians are 'really losing sleep' over this financial burden, survey says
San Francisco Chronicle.....October 12, 2026

Open enrollment for the 2027 health coverage is right around the corner.
KCRA 3 News.....October 8, 2026

Making Health Coverage More Affordable for SoCal Families
Precinct Reporter.....October 8, 2026

Covered California is preparing a big change: Who benefits and from what date?
2001 Live.....October 7, 2026

Coverage Crisis: As More of the 'Big Beautiful Bill' Takes Effect, Hundreds of Thousands of Californians Are Starting to Lose Their Health Insurance
Coachella Valley Independent.....October 6, 2026

Financial help may make health coverage more affordable
Our Weekly.....October 5, 2026

A life change could mean you now qualify for health coverage
El Popular.....October 2, 2026

Tips on preparing for open enrollment in California
Public News Service.....October 1, 2026

Covered California names new CIO to lead digital services
Action News New.....September 30, 2026

With changes coming to health insurance next year, health leaders are emphasizing the importance of staying informed.
Impulso Newspaper.....September 28, 2026

What will California's next governor do about healthcare? Here are Becerra and Hilton's plans
CalMatters.....September 28, 2026

A change in your life could mean that you now qualify for health coverage
El Popular.....September 24, 2026

Covered California Holds Summit Over Looming HR-1 Cuts to Federal Subsidies
The San Fernando Valley Sun.....September 24, 2026

California largely shielded from federal Obamacare cuts announced by VP Vance
The Sacramento Bee.....September 23, 2026

Here is how you can apply for the Covered California special enrollment period
Telemundo.....September 18, 2026

Industry titans' warning to Congress: Do what we say or health insurance premiums are going up
POLITICO.....September 16, 2026

Financial subsidies give Californians another reason to shop for and compare health insurance plans through Covered California and enjoy the best prices through 2027
Crossings TV.....September 16, 2026

Doctors say children of immigrants are missing healthcare
Stateline.....September 16, 2026

Stark differences in kids' health coverage
Axios.....September 16, 2026

Uninsured rate holds steady as hospitals brace for spike
Modern Healthcare.....September 16, 2026

How Candidates Have Addressed Affordability in the Midterm Campaigns
The New York Times.....September 14, 2026

Your health insurance bills are about to go up
Medical Daily.....September 14, 2026

Covered California Premiums Rise Again as Uninsured Californians Under 65 Are Projected to Nearly Double by 2030
Medical Daily.....September 14, 2026

Anger Over Health Costs Clouds Midterms
KFF Health News.....September 11, 2026

Increases in healthcare spending the largest driver behind premium growth: Yale study
Fierce Healthcare.....September 10, 2026

Trump announces $500M in rebates from alleged overcharges under Obamacare
USA Today.....September 10, 2026

Catch 22: Californians can't afford health insurance but face fines if they drop it
NBC 4 Los Angeles.....September 9, 2026

Giving Our Black Children the Healthiest Start We Can
The Observer.....September 9, 2026

More Americans Are Losing Health Insurance—And Everyone Will Pay
TIME.....September 8, 2026

'It's Triage': California's Next Governor Will Face Destabilizing Surge in Uninsured
KFF Health News.....September 8, 2026

How 2026 candidates are targeting health care "corruption"
Axios.....September 8, 2026

Democrats eye expanded Medicare coverage if they take U.S. House
The Washington Post.....September 4, 2026

Covered California Small Business Brings New Options to California Brokers
California Broker Magazine.....September 3, 2026

COVERED CALIFORNIA | Small Business News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE
RELEASE Oct. 13, 2026

Covered California for Small Business Announces Rate Change and New Carrier for 2027 Amid Record-High Enrollment

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — Covered California for Small Business (CCSB) announced a statewide weighted average rate change of 8.6 percent for small-business employers and their employees and the addition of Western Health Advantage as a new carrier for the upcoming 2027 plan year.

As of September, 82,905 Californians receive coverage from plans offered through Covered California for Small Business, the highest enrollment in CCSB history and a five percent increase from 2025 to 2026. In addition, 9,969 small businesses are currently enrolled, showing that Covered California continues to offer the best coverage options for businesses and their employees.

"Thousands of Californians are building their dreams of entrepreneurship in the state. Our record enrollment is proof that small business owners trust Covered California for Small Business to support their dreams by providing affordable, high-quality coverage for their employees and their families," said Covered California Executive Director Jessica Altman. "A healthy workforce is a productive workforce. CCSB plans provide coverage that can help prevent illness, increase productivity and retention, and improve their overall health and wellness.

(Continued)

[1] Source: Business Group on Health, "2027 Employer Healthcare Strategy Survey: Full Report."

This year's preliminary rate change of 8.6 percent is below the 9.2 percent increase that the Business Group on Health is projecting for large employers nationally1. Covered California continues to work with carriers to offer high-quality coverage at affordable prices for all eligible small businesses the state.

CCSB will offer plans from four carriers in 2027 at varying rates and metal tiers, ranging from Bronze, Silver, Gold, and Platinum. The list of carriers includes Blue Shield of California, which will offer health maintenance organization (HMO) and preferred provider organization (PPO) plans, and Kaiser Permanente (offering HMO plans).

They are joined by Sharp Health Plan, and their availability HMO plans in San Diego County, and Western Health Advantage with HMO plans available in 10 counties across Northern California. Across the state, consumers have 44 distinct plan options to choose from. CCSB also offers Delta Dental of California dental plans, with HMO and PPO options available for employees and their dependents.

Table 1: Weighted Rate Change by Carrier for Plan Year 2027

Carrier	2027 Average Rate Change
Blue Shield of California	12.1%
Kaiser Permanente	5.3%
Sharp Health Plan	12.3%
Weighted average rate for plan year 2027	**8.6%**

Businesses with up to 100 full-time equivalent employees can apply for health coverage for their workers through the CCSB marketplace. Unlike the individual market, there are no open enrollment or special-enrollment periods. Businesses may enroll at any time during the year if they meet these additional criteria:

- The business has at least one employee who receives a W-2 (excluding the owner or the owner's spouse).

(Continued)

- The majority of eligible employees live or work in California.

- The business offers health insurance to all eligible employees and meets contribution and participation requirements.

- Federal tax credits are available at varying amounts depending on the type of organization:

- For-profit employers could receive financial help for up to 50 percent of eligible premium expenses.

- Tax-exempt employers could receive financial help for up to 35 percent of eligible premium expenses.

Employers control the contribution amount (50% minimum) and can offer employees a range of tier options so they can shop and compare to find the plan and corresponding networks of doctors and hospitals that meet their family's needs and lifestyles. As coverage level increases, plans generally cover a higher share of medical costs — and employees typically pay more in monthly premiums.

Once an employer has enrolled, coverage and premiums are guaranteed for 12 months from the effective coverage date. Newly eligible employees may be added during the plan year with a qualifying event

"We know that in time of rising costs, affordability is top-of-mind for our small businesses in California," said Altman. "That is why we work constantly with carriers to provide competitive rates and expanded options that fit the needs and budgets of businesses and employees year-round."

Visit the redesigned CoveredCA.com/small-business for information on how to apply and obtain financial help through a simpler, consumer-centered process and experience. Californians may also call (844) 332-8384 or send an email to smallbusiness@covered.ca.gov for any questions about enrollment.

(Continued)

About Covered California for Small Business

Covered California for Small Business (CCSB) is a health insurance marketplace specifically designed for small businesses with 100 or fewer full-time equivalent employees. Through CCSB, small business owners can shop and compare from a choice of competitively priced health insurance plans from private insurance companies and obtain federal tax credits so both the employer and their employees can find a plan that fits their needs and budget.

Covered California is an independent part of the state government – overseen by a five-member board appointed by the governor and the Legislature – with a mission to increase the number of insured Californians, improve health care quality, lower costs, and reduce health care disparities. For more information about Covered California for Small Business please visit CoveredCA.com/small-business.

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COVERED CALIFORNIA **News Release**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Sept. 23, 2026

Covered California Welcomes Sonia Fernandes as New Assistant General Counsel



SACRAMENTO, Calif.— Covered California has announced Sonia Fernandes as the new Assistant General Counsel in its Office of Legal Affairs.

In the role, Fernandes will serve as the senior legal adviser to Covered California divisions on complex regulatory and operational issues, oversee a team of attorneys, provide legal guidance on contracts, policies, regulations and compliance, and advise leadership on high-risk legal matters.

Fernandes has extensive experience in state and federal health care law, including administrative investigations, litigation, and health plan compliance.

“Sonia brings the right mix of experience, knowledge and care to her work, and she has proven time and time again she can expertly handle complex and complicated legal matters with nuance and sensitivity,” said Covered California Executive Director Jessica Altman. “We are thrilled to welcome Sonia to the team and are excited to have her immense talents and expertise at Covered California.”

Most recently, Fernandes served as Deputy Director and Chief Counsel, Office of Enforcement, at the California Department of Managed Health Care (DMHC), where she managed the DMHC’s statewide litigation activities. Her efforts led to historic settlement agreements aimed at improving access to medical and behavioral health care and strengthening health care delivery systems for millions of Californians.

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Prior to time as Deputy Director, Fernandes was an attorney in several offices and an Assistant Chief Counsel for the Office of Plan Monitoring for DMHC, where she managed and oversaw the work of several staff attorneys and directed audits of commercial and Medi-Cal managed care plans, including an assessment of plan operations, which involved utilization management, quality assurance, and grievance and appeals systems.

Before joining DMHC, she was a staff attorney for Sacramento Child Advocates, Inc. where she represented children in Sacramento County's foster care system who had experienced abuse or neglect, handling all aspects of litigation.

"I'm honored to join Covered California at a time when strong legal guidance is essential to advancing access, affordability and equity in healthcare," said Fernandes. "I look forward to collaborating with the agency's leadership to navigate complex regulatory challenges, manage risk thoughtfully and help ensure that legal strategy supports better outcomes for Californians. I've seen firsthand the devastating effects of access gaps and know that adequate care can profoundly impact lives and alter trajectories."

Fernandes received her J.D. with a concentration in intellectual property law from the University of the Pacific McGeorge School of Law and holds a bachelor's degree in criminal justice administration from San Jose State University. She is also an advisory board member for My Sister's House, a nonprofit that assists survivors of domestic violence, and a former president of the Women Lawyers of Sacramento.

Fernandes will be replacing Allison Pease and will earn $238,008 annually, effective Sept. 15, 2026.

About Covered California

Covered California is the state's health insurance marketplace, where Californians can find affordable, high-quality insurance from top insurance companies. Covered California is the only place where individuals who qualify can get financial assistance on a sliding scale to reduce premium costs. Consumers can then compare health insurance plans and choose the plan that works best for their health needs and budget. Depending on their income, some consumers may qualify for the low-cost or no-cost Medi-Cal program.

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Covered California is an independent part of the state government whose job is to make the health insurance marketplace work for California's consumers. It is overseen by a five-member board appointed by the governor and the Legislature. For more information about Covered California, please visit www.CoveredCA.com.

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COVERED CALIFORNIA News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Oct. 15, 2026

Covered California Names Mary Watanabe New Chief Deputy Executive Director, External Outreach and Strategy



SACRAMENTO, Calif. — Covered California has announced Mary Watanabe as its new Chief Deputy Executive Director, External Outreach and Strategy.

In the role, Watanabe will lead Covered California's outreach, marketing, communications, and community engagement efforts statewide — overseeing the Outreach and Sales Marketing, Communications and Public Relations, and External Affairs and Community Engagement divisions. The role sets enterprise-wide strategy for how Covered California reaches, informs, and engages consumers and communities across the state, helping millions of Californians learn about, enroll in, and retain affordable health coverage. She will also serve as a key advisor to the Executive Director and Board on the organization's public presence and partnerships. She will report directly to the Executive Director.

Watanabe returns to Covered California, where she previously served as Deputy Director for the Sales Division from 2013 to 2015. During her initial tenure, she oversaw the implementation of the Navigator Grant Program, the Outreach and Education Grant Program, and the engagement of community partners to educate consumers and small business owners about the health care options available through Covered California.

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“We are thrilled to welcome Mary back to Covered California to lead our efforts to reach, retain, and enroll Californians across the state,” said Covered California Executive Director Jessica Altman. “Mary has spent her extensive career fighting for equal access to affordable health care. Her experience, skills, and values will strengthen the work of Covered California to expand access to high-quality, affordable care.”

Following her first stint at Covered California, Watanabe served as the Deputy Director for Health Policy and Stakeholder Relations at the Department of Managed Health Care (DMHC), where she was responsible for fostering proactive and effective relations between the DMHC and its stakeholders, while serving as primary advisor to the Director on critical issues.

For the last six years, she has served as Director of the DMHC where she leads the department responsible for licensing health plans, assisting health plan members, actively monitoring health plan operations, and reviewing the financial stability of health plans and medical groups. In that role, she is responsible for regulating 139 plans and ensuring the 30 million Californians who receive health care coverage from a DMHC licensed plan have access to equitable, high-quality, timely, and affordable health care.

During Watanabe’s time as Director, the DMHC nearly doubled in positions and budget authority as the Department took on new work to support the Governor’s priorities and to implement new legislation. Watanabe led the DMHC’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic, including issuing 50 All Plan Letters to ensure Californians had timely access to health care services, testing, and vaccinations. Her work also focused on increasing access to behavioral health services, including conducting focused behavioral health investigations of commercial health plans and enforcing state and federal mental health parity laws.

“I have spent my career in public service working to ensure all Californians have meaningful access to health care coverage. At a time when the coverage gains of the last decade are being threatened, it seems timely to return to the work that I care deeply about and that is at the heart of my passion for serving the diverse communities in California,” said Watanabe. “I am excited to return to Covered California to lead the team responsible for ensuring Californians have the information and resources they need to enroll and retain their health care coverage.”

(Continued)

Watanabe succeeds Doug McKeever, who is retiring after serving in the position since January 2017. The annual salary for Watanabe's position is $325,008 annually, and she will officially start her new role November 16th.

About Covered California

Covered California is the state's health insurance marketplace, where Californians can find affordable, high-quality insurance from top insurance companies. Covered California is the only place where individuals who qualify can get financial assistance on a sliding scale to reduce premium costs. Consumers can then compare health insurance plans and choose the plan that works best for their health needs and budget. Depending on their income, some consumers may qualify for the low-cost or no-cost Medi-Cal program.

Covered California is an independent part of the state government whose job is to make the health insurance marketplace work for California's consumers. It is overseen by a five-member board appointed by the governor and the Legislature. For more information about Covered California, please visit www.CoveredCA.com.

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