

# Opinion: Bipartisan overhaul of ACA needed

By Clint Purvance

The Republican Party's decision on March 24 to pull the vote to repeal the Affordable Care Act was met with disappointment and relief. While backers of the newly proposed legislation were disappointed that they could not find sufficient support, residents who depend on the Affordable Care Act's medical protections and insurance options felt relief. Hope continues for a broad bipartisan approach to changing this complex legislation resulting in improved coverage balanced with affordability for our citizens.



Clint Purvance

California policymakers have made a diligent effort to make the Affordable Care Act and healthcare reform work. State legislators have elected to expand eligibility for low-income families and put forth legislation to manage out-of-pocket costs.

One-third of California residents and two-thirds of the state's children depend on MediCal for medical coverage. Individuals eligible for MediCal include the lowest income families and individuals with specific diseases, disabilities, and/or medical conditions.

Currently, 9,500 residents in the South Lake Tahoe area

receive MediCal benefits, more than double the number of MediCal participants in 2014. Combined with support from Barton Health's certified enrollment counselors, the South Shore's uninsured population rate has reduced from 26.2 percent in 2012 to 14.7 percent in 2015.

With the increase in MediCal and insured patients in the last four years, Barton Health has seen greater demand for health care services. As an independent health care system, Barton Health has responded to the community's needs by expanding specialty services, including palliative care, psychiatry, urology, and telemedicine. We have recruited additional pediatricians, family medicine physicians, and obstetrician/gynecologists as well as a trauma surgeon, spine specialist, and pain management doctor. Our focus on prevention has grown and we look forward to providing more preventative care options when the Robert Maloff Center of Excellence opens next winter.

With the Affordable Care Act, the health care landscape has changed. While more wellness and preventative services are covered, insurance companies have restructured putting more financial burden on the patients.

Healthcare systems have responded by making sure patients have access to additional wellness services, insurance coverage, and financial assistance programs. Financial assistance programs may include price estimator tools, point of service pay programs offering discounts for upfront pay, payment plans, and charity programs. These efforts are intended to reduce out-of-pocket health care costs for all patients.

While we are thankful more patients have additional access to health and wellness services in our community, our health system is aware of areas that need attention. We are hopeful Congress will address the insurance market's rising health care premiums and stabilize private insurance rates for residents who pay high out-of-pocket costs.

Barton Health strives to serve the needs of all community members and visitors, with a focus on improved access to care. We are working closely with the California Hospital Association, American Hospital Association, and the American Medical Association to advocate for our patients and find long term, bipartisan solutions. We are listening to input from patients and the community and making changes.

Every person deserves to have options and choices they can afford to live a healthy life.

*Clint Purvance is the CEO and president of Barton Health in South Lake Tahoe.*