

Advocacy FAQ - Supporting AB 2081: Expanding Access to the HCBA Waiver

What is AB 2081?

California Assembly Bill 2081 expands access to the Home and Community-Based Alternatives (HCBA) Waiver, a Medi-Cal program that allows people with complex medical needs to receive care in their homes or community instead of hospitals or nursing facilities. The bill ensures that California increases the number of HCBA waiver slots, including 10,000 more Californians each year and works to eliminate long waiting lists for services.

Why is this bill necessary?

Thousands of Californians who qualify for HCBA services cannot access them because the program has limited capacity. As a result, eligible individuals are often forced to remain in hospitals, nursing facilities, and other institutional settings even when they could safely live in the community with the right support. This leads to higher healthcare costs, poorer quality of life, and unnecessary institutionalization. *No eligible Californian should be forced into institutional care simply because waiver services are unavailable.* AB 2081 ensures that individuals with complex medical needs have access to the home-based care they need to live safely and with dignity.

What does AB 2081 do?

AB 2081 strengthens the HCBA waiver program by:

1. Expanding Access - Beginning in 2027, California must increase the number of HCBA waiver slots by at least 10,000 slots every year.
2. Reducing Waiting Lists - The Department of Health Care Services must ensure there is sufficient capacity to enroll all eligible individuals who want to participate in the waiver.
3. Proactively Monitoring Capacity - The state must expand waiver capacity before enrollment reaches maximum levels, preventing new waiting lists from forming.

Who benefits from the HCBA waiver?

The HCBA waiver provides home-based services for Californians with significant medical needs who would otherwise require institutional care, including:

- Individuals transitioning out of hospitals
- People eligible for nursing facility care
- Individuals with complex disabilities
- Children with significant medical needs
- Older adults needing long-term services and supports
- Medically frail unsheltered individuals

These services allow people of all ages with chronic care needs to remain safely in their homes and communities.

Why are home- and community-based services important?

Home- and community-based services are a critical part of modern healthcare systems. Research consistently shows that these services: (1) Improve health outcomes¹; (2) Increase independence and dignity²; (3) Reduce reliance on institutional care³; and (4) Lower overall healthcare costs⁴. *Supporting people in the community is more cost-effective than institutional care.*

How does this bill support California's healthcare goals?

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Expanding HCBA services supports California's broader efforts to: (1) Strengthen long-term services and supports; (2) Expand home-based care; (3) Reduce unnecessary institutionalization; (4) Improve care coordination across systems; and (5) Support aging and disability in the community.

Why does this matter for people experiencing homelessness?

Many people experiencing homelessness have serious medical conditions that qualify them for HCBA services. Without access to these services, individuals may cycle between emergency departments, hospitals, and institutional care settings.

When paired with supportive housing, HCBA services can help individuals: (1) Stabilize complex medical conditions; (2) Avoid repeated hospitalizations; (3) Maintain housing stability and (4) Improve quality of life.

Why can't hospitals simply discharge patients to skilled nursing facilities (SNFs)?

While hospitals often attempt to discharge medically fragile patients to skilled nursing facilities, many individuals experiencing homelessness face barriers to SNF placement. Facilities may decline admissions due to complex medical or social needs, limited capacity, or concerns about where a patient will go after their short-term stay.

As a result, individuals may remain hospitalized longer than medically necessary or be discharged back to homelessness, continuing a cycle of medical instability. Expanding access to community-based services through the HCBA Waiver provides an alternative pathway for people to receive care in housing and community settings.

What is the fiscal impact?

Home- and community-based services are often significantly less expensive than institutional care. By expanding access to HCBA services, California can: (1) Reduce avoidable hospitalizations; (2) Reduce emergency department use; and (3) Reduce long-term nursing facility placements. These investments can produce *significant healthcare system savings* over time.

What happens next?

If enacted, the Department of Health Care Services will: (1) Expand HCBA waiver capacity beginning in 2027; (2) Work to eliminate waiting lists for eligible individuals; and (3) Report annually to the Legislature on program performance.

How can organizations support AB 2081?

Advocates and organizations can support the bill by: (1) Joining coalition efforts; (2) Educating policymakers about HCBS programs; (3) Sharing stories of individuals impacted by waiver services; and (4) Supporting policies that expand community-based care.

¹ Lyu & Fan (2024) - SAGE Open / Research in Gerontological Social Work. *The Impact of Home- and Community-Based Services on the Health of Older Adults: A Meta-Analysis.*

² Wang et al. (2024) - AHRQ Technical Brief No. 49. *Evidence Map on Home- and Community-Based Services and Person-Centered Care for Older Adults With Functional Limitations.* Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality

³ Wang, Temkin-Greener et al. (2024) - Journal of Applied Gerontology. *Outcomes After Community Discharge From Skilled Nursing Facilities: The Role of Medicaid HCBS.*