
SENATE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Senator Sabrina Cervantes, Chair
2025 - 2026 Regular Session

AB 1949 (Lee) - Medi-Cal: acupuncture treatments

Version: May 18, 2026

Urgency: No

Hearing Date: June 22, 2026

Policy Vote: HEALTH 10 - 0

Mandate: No

Consultant: Agnes Lee

Bill Summary: AB 1949 would require the Medi-Cal program to cover up to 24 acupuncture visits per beneficiary per calendar year, as specified.

Fiscal Impact: Unknown cost pressures to the Medi-Cal program due to potential increased utilization of optional benefit services (General Fund and federal funds).

Background: The Medi-Cal program provides health care services to qualified low-income individuals. Current law establishes a schedule of benefits under the Medi-Cal program, which includes benefits required under federal law and benefits that are federally allowable and provided at the state's option. Acupuncture is an optional federal benefit for which there are federal matching funds when a state elects to provide the service.

According to the Medi-Cal provider manual, acupuncture services are covered when used to prevent, modify, or alleviate the perception of severe, persistent chronic pain resulting from a generally recognized medical condition. Outpatient acupuncture services in fee-for-service Medi-Cal are limited to two services in a calendar month, although additional services can be provided based upon medical necessity through prior authorization. The two services per month limitation also applies collectively across other optional medical benefits, including chiropractic services, physical therapy, occupational therapy, speech pathology, audiological services, and podiatry. As such, if a recipient is receiving other optional benefits that month, their access to acupuncture (or any of the other optional benefits) would be further limited.

Proposed Law: AB 1949 would require the Medi-Cal program to cover up to 24 acupuncture visits per beneficiary per calendar year and provide that additional acupuncture visits beyond 24 per calendar year may be authorized based on medical necessity pursuant to prior authorization procedures established by the Department of Health Care Services (DHCS).

Related Legislation: SB 944 (Wiener) would remove a requirement related to federal matching funds for Medi-Cal acupuncture services. The bill is currently in the Assembly Appropriations Committee.

-- END --