
SENATE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Senator Sabrina Cervantes, Chair
2025 - 2026 Regular Session

SB 944 (Wiener) - Medi-Cal: acupuncture

Version: February 2, 2026

Urgency: No

Hearing Date: April 13, 2026

Policy Vote: HEALTH 9 - 0

Mandate: No

Consultant: Agnes Lee

Bill Summary: SB 944 would remove an existing limitation on the coverage of acupuncture in the Medi-Cal program, as specified.

Fiscal Impact: Unknown potential General Fund cost pressures to the extent that federal matching funds for Medi-Cal acupuncture services become unavailable and would require a General Fund backfill.

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. In general, federal Medicaid matching funds are available for these services.

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 (with or without electric stimulation of the needles) are limited to two services in a calendar month, although additional services can be provided based upon medical necessity through prior authorization. State law requires that acupuncture is a Medi-Cal covered service "to the extent federal matching funds are provided for acupuncture." Acupuncture is an optional federal benefit for which there are federal matching funds when a state elects to provide the service.

Proposed Law: SB 944 would remove the limitation "to the extent federal matching funds are provided for acupuncture" on the coverage of acupuncture in the Medi-Cal program. Thus acupuncture would be a covered Medi-Cal benefit, regardless of whether federal matching funds are available.

Related Legislation: AB 1949 (Lee) would also remove the limitation on Medi-Cal acupuncture services related to federal matching funds, and make other changes to the Medi-Cal acupuncture benefit. The bill is currently in the Assembly Health Committee.

Staff Comments: During the 2025-26 state budget process, the Administration had proposed to eliminate the Medi-Cal acupuncture benefit, though the proposal was ultimately not adopted. At the time, the Department of Health Care Services had estimated that the proposal to eliminate the acupuncture benefit would result in savings of \$13.6 million total funds (\$5.4 million General Fund and \$8.2 million federal funds), which reflected half fiscal-year costs based on a January 1, 2026 implementation date.

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