

# Winning Health Care for Immigrants: The California Precedent



## IN THIS EPISODE

**State by state, advocates for guaranteed health care for immigrants are slowly making gains - *what's their formula for success?*** Which California immigrants will get access to full Medicaid coverage in 2024, for the first time? **How did this happen in an America that has complicated feelings about people who are undocumented?**

For these answers and more, we spoke with **Maribel Nuñez, executive director of [Inland Equity Partnership](#)**, an economic justice coalition working to reduce poverty for the most vulnerable in Southern California's Inland Empire. From the front lines of this struggle, Maribel is here to break it all down for us! This is the first of two episodes.

# WE DISCUSS

*California is now the only state in the nation that will offer Medicaid to all undocumented residents whose income qualifies them for it. Can you talk to us about the state's history when it comes to extending health care to immigrants?*

"... when the Affordable Care Act came about...(the) Medi-Cal expansion, the [Bridge to Reform](#) program...not only did we say 'Yes, we're going to do Medi-Cal expansion,' cuz it was going to be an option, we were going to use...state funds to cover [DACA](#) individuals. And we've done that in the past...in California, we've had this long history - even before the ACA - to use state funds to expand [health care to] Californians that don't have health care access." – **Maribel Nuñez**

*The ACA didn't provide coverage for undocumented immigrants, yet they were one of the largest groups of uninsured California residents. How did the campaign to cover them unfold?*

"We started with the [Health4All](#) kids, (age) zero to 19, and then the young adults (age) 19 to 26. And then we got the elders. So every year, right, we were working on it – sometimes two years, three years per each group.

We've always wanted everyone, but it's been an incremental kind of fight and win and so we're happy that now it includes the remaining, which is the 26-49 (age group). That includes...everyone that's undocumented that are Medi-Cal eligible.

You still have the remaining group that is not Medi-Cal eligible so there's still more work to be done there." – **Maribel Nuñez**

## *Tell us about the role played by your organization in this campaign.*

"...we do have a long history. We started as an organization when ... the safety net programs were being gutted and health care is something that we had been including in our advocacy efforts at the state level, at the state Capitol in Sacramento.

...when you're seeing (the programs in) San Bernardino (County), Riverside (County), you know, being gutted. . . not having the strong safety net... we felt that we needed more lobbyists or advocates at the county systems level.

So we use our...history and experience and, and coalition building, the kind of work that we did at the state level, at the county level.

So we've been doing county budget trainings, budget advocacy, and rallies, like the way we've been doing in California. – **Maribel Nuñez**

## Helpful Links

[Inland Equity Partnership](#)

[Organizing for America](#)

[California first to cover health care for all immigrants](#), *AP News*

[Medicaid Section 1115 Waiver: California Bridge to Reform](#)

[Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals \(DACA\)](#), *Immigrant Legal Resource Center*

[Health Coverage of Immigrants](#), *Kaiser Family Foundation*

[Health4All](#), *California Immigrant Policy Center*

[Full Scope vs Restricted Scope Medi-Cal](#), *San Luis Obispo County Health Access*

[Medically Indigent Services Program](#), *Riverside County*

[County Medically Indigent Programs](#), *Insure the Uninsured Project*

[Federally Qualified Healthcare Centers](#)

[May Revise](#), *California Dept. of Finance*

## Episode Transcript

Read the full [episode transcript](#).

# Biography of Maribel Nuñez

Maribel Nuñez is the executive director of [Inland Equity Partnership](#) and [Inland Equity Community Land Trust](#). She is the daughter of Mexican immigrants, and the first generation of her family born in the U.S.

She leads projects that engage underrepresented people in the political process and in finding the voice and courage to stand up for their rights.

Her workshops acquaint people with relevant political issues and equip them with effective advocacy strategies.

In 2011, she was part of the team working with [League of United Latin American Citizens](#) (LULAC) to get congressional, state, and local school redistricting done in western Riverside County. To date, the project has registered nearly 6,000 students, a success resulting from Maribel's attention to detail and commitment to civic engagement.

In 2019 she helped co-found the Inland Equity Community Land Trust, to develop and steward permanent affordable housing in Riverside and San Bernardino counties through a community land trust, (formerly [California Partnership](#)).

Working with Inland Equity, she helped organize a coalition to pass anti-poverty measures like Health4All Kids, repealing the Maximum Family Grant, lifting the Lifetime Ban on CalWORKS and CalFresh benefits, passing Homes for Homeowners Not Corporations (SB-1079) and helped pass eviction moratoriums at the state and local level.

She also serves as a board member of [Healthy California Now](#), a California single-payer coalition. She is a true leader who works for improving our communities and strongly represents those who do not have a voice.

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