

Fed up with profit-driven
health care?
New law puts patients first.

Featuring Irene Kao



IN THIS EPISODE

This time on Code WACK!

What kind of a healthcare system could actually promote equity? How does a new bill recently signed by Governor Gavin Newsom get California closer to universal, single-payer health care? ***And how is it different from previous Medicare-for-All bills?***

To find out, we spoke to **Irene Kao**, executive director of **Courage California**, a progressive grassroots advocacy organization for which she's the first woman of color to lead. She's also a board member of the **Healthy California Now**, a single-payer advocacy coalition. This is the first episode in a two-part series with Irene Kao.

SHOW NOTES

WE DISCUSS

Tell us about your organization, Courage California.

"Courage California has 1.4 million members around California and the nation, and we really try to prioritize people who are underrepresented at key decision-making tables. So that includes people of color, low-income communities, young people, LGBTQ-plus populations...

"And our goal is really to ensure that Californians feel like they have the tools and information they need to feel empowered to take action on the issues that they care the most about.

"That can take the form of ... signing petitions, calling the representatives at the state or the national level, and ... turning people out to vote in every election that they're eligible for, holding corporations and elected officials accountable.

"Really quickly, just want to mention that we'll be launching our primary election [Courage Voter Guide](#) as well as a [Courage Score](#), that's covering this last 2023 legislative session, in January." – **Irene Kao**

How important is health equity to Courage California?

"... for us, healthcare justice has always been a top priority and especially as it mixes with racial, economic and climate justice.

"... that's taken a lot of different forms in terms of how we've supported health care and healthcare justice. For instance, we've supported every single single-payer bill that's made it through the state legislature. We've been pushing for it at the federal level as well.

"And then as you mentioned, we're part of the [Healthy California Now](#) Coalition, but we're also part of a couple other coalitions ... the [#Health4All](#) coalition and the [Care4All California](#) coalitions specifically. – **Irene Kao**

Why do you believe that with single payer, health care would be more equitable?

"... the healthcare insurance industry is very profit driven and because of that we have very different outcomes in health care than if it were more patient driven. So for us, single-payer healthcare run by the government ... eliminates that profit motive and re-focuses healthcare back on patients and patient outcomes.

"... health care would no longer be tied to employment which obviously is really important. But then it would also help to eliminate barriers that people are facing now in accessing health care, whether that's age, disability, income, immigration status.

"... And so by virtue of that, it would make things a lot more equitable." – ***Irene Kao***

Let's talk about SB 770, the most recent single-payer bill to pass in California. What's it about and why is it so important?

"...this bill in particular is really about compelling California leaders to start having conversations with the Biden administration about what ... sort of single-payer program would qualify for a federal waiver, which would then unlock federal funding for a single-payer system.

"And I know that's really important 'cause almost always when we talk to people about single payer, (the) number one concern is cost."

"I think also because single payer, at least the way we envision it as a coalition, and this bill sort of envisions it, is by bringing more people to the table to talk about what's really needed in a single-payer system. So that single payer is not just a process or a way, but just a whole framework, a more holistic framework towards approaching health care.

“By nature of bringing more people to the table, you have to start having conversations about what is also not working in the current healthcare system that we have and what could be done to improve that and single payer is a vehicle for it, but it's also not going to be the thing that solves all of those either.” – **Irene Kao**

Helpful Links

[Courage California](#), [Courage Voter Guide](#), [Courage Score](#)

[#Health4 All](#), *Health Access*

[Care4All California](#)

[Healthy California Now](#)

[Newsom signs unified healthcare financing bill SB 770 into law](#), *State of Reform*

[Values-Based Foundation for a U.S. Single Payer Health System Model](#), *Frontiers in Sociology*

[Practicing Cultural Competence and Cultural Humility in the Care of Diverse Patients](#), *Focus, The Journal of Lifelong Learning in Psychiatry*

Episode Transcript

Read the full [episode transcript](#).

Biography: Irene Kao

Irene joined [Courage California](#), in 2020, as the first woman of color to lead the organization.

She brings more than twenty years of experience working with and advocating for low-income communities of color, including in immigrant and refugee support services, public housing, early childhood education, media, philanthropy and politics.

Prior to joining Courage California, Irene was a strategic advisor to the leadership of several nonprofits and donor collaboratives.

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