



***Money, money, money!  
The politics of funding  
single payer***

***Featuring Irene Kao***

***This time on Code WACK!***

**What are the main obstacles in implementing a new law paving the way to Medicare for All in California? *Where will we get the money to pay for it?* Where does the biggest opposition lie – and *what's at stake if the law doesn't fulfill its mission?* How is the 2024 election key to our healthcare future?**

To find out, we spoke to **Irene Kao**, executive director of **Courage California**, a progressive grassroots advocacy organization. She's also a board member of the single payer advocacy coalition **Healthy California Now**.

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# WE DISCUSS

*What are the main challenges in implementing Senate Bill 770, a bill that compels California state leaders to negotiate for waivers to unlock federal funding for a state-based single-payer system?*

"You're taking the government of the largest state in the nation and you're taking the federal administration. So two huge bureaucracies, two big systems, need to be talking to each other about this.

"So I think one of the challenges will be really about how do you get these two administrations ... talking to each other -

"... but how do you also ensure that this doesn't just become sort of an "in-the-weeds" process, but really becomes a much broader conversation about ... the transformational opportunities that we have with a single-payer system?" – **Irene Kao**

*So what opposition is there to SB 770, which was recently signed into law, and is this a problem?*

"I think that the real opposition that we saw for this bill, and that we're going to see every year, is from the healthcare insurance industry. That's not going away, obviously ...

"I also feel like 2024 is going to be complicated because ... we know right now here in California, we have a Democratic super majority in the state legislature. We have a friendly Democratic Biden administration to work with at the federal level.

"And fingers crossed we grow our super majority and get more progressive Democrats in the state legislature, and the Biden administration gets reelected so we have, again, like more favorable conditions past 2024." – **Irene Kao**

***SB 770 calls for including dental, vision and hearing care. How realistic is it that the state could save enough money with single payer to cover all of that?***

“So the [Healthy for All California Commission](#), which was convened by the governor and the state legislature, that met over several years ... [produced] [a final report](#) showing that there would be cost savings ... Over the next decade we could save up to like \$500 billion by transitioning to single-payer health care.

“So I think it would save the state, and it would save the individual residents of the state as well, and that savings would more than cover dental, vision and hearing.” – **Irene Kao**

***Now that Senate Bill 770 has been signed, what is Healthy California Now focusing on and what are the organization's next steps?***

“Yes, so as with the passage of most bills, implementation is the big, next to-do.

“Healthy California Now is already a coalition of labor unions, grassroots groups, and single-payer groups. But we still need ... to ... engage a body that really represents, again, the diversity of all Californians. For several months now, we've been convening what's called an Advocates Table.

“So it is broadening this coalition, bringing more voices and more groups into these conversations to start talking about ‘*what does single payer look like?*,’ ‘*what needs to be included?*,’ ‘*who needs to be included?*,’ and “*how that's going to happen.*” – **Irene Kao**

# Helpful Links

[Healthy California for All Commission Final Report](#) *(See data on projected savings starting on page 28).*

[California law signals ongoing push for single-payer system](#), *Roll Call*

[U.S. and Global Approaches to Financing Long-Term Care: Understanding the Patchwork](#), *Commonwealth Fund*

[Healthy California Now](#)

[CBO on Single Payer Benefits to the Economy](#), *Physicians for a National Health Program*

[A Road Map to 'Single Payer,' How States Can Escape the Clutches of a Private Health Insurance System](#), *Public Citizen*

## 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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