



Assemblymember Lisa Calderon, 57th District

AB 619 – Lung Health

SUMMARY

Assembly Bill 619 establishes a Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disorder (COPD) awareness campaign and requires counties to create plans for managing the adverse effects of wildfire smoke on vulnerable populations.

BACKGROUND

Existing law requires the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) to award and administer grants for projects directed at the prevention of tobacco-related diseases. CDPH is also tasked with submitting to the California Air Resources Board recommendations for ambient air quality standards. These efforts do not consider progressive lung diseases or bring awareness to the public health issue.

During an emergency in the state, such as a severe wildfire season, the Office of Emergency Services is responsible for emergency and disaster response services. Counties are also required to integrate access and functional needs into their emergency plans. Existing law fails to require any information, services, or recommendations be provided to the public on respiratory health during state emergencies.

PROBLEM

Today, Californians are facing a diverse threat to respiratory health. COPD, the term used to describe progressive lung diseases including emphysema, is the fifth-leading cause of death in California and is projected to be the third-leading cause of death nationally by 2030.¹ Just under half of those in California with COPD belong to minority populations, while one-third live below the 130% federal poverty level.² This risk is compounded further by the COVID-19 pandemic, as those with COPD are more vulnerable to the effects of the virus.³ Despite this, the state of California has taken little action to address the adverse effects of COPD on Californians.

In addition, the worsening climate crisis suggests that our state will bear witness to more frequent and intense wildfires, leading to dangerous air quality and wildfire smoke. Wildfire smoke constitutes nearly half the fine particle pollution in the western part of the US, with recent research revealing it contains harmful fungi and bacteria.⁴ While COPD and

wildfire smoke may work independent of each other, the impact they have on Californians is clear. Respiratory health must be addressed with legislation that protects all Californians from existing disparities and emerging threats.

SOLUTION

AB 619 addresses these problems by requiring CDPH to utilize existing outreach programs to conduct provider awareness, which will promote the diagnosis and treatment of those with COPD in California. To mitigate the impacts of wildfires on lung health, this bill also requires counties to provide lung health-related information and preparation in their next emergency plan and requires CDPH to conduct public-facing outreach on the topic. These provisions would provide awareness to residents on protection from severe air quality and plan for the smooth delivery of emergency provisions, such as offering protective-air filtration masks for those who are the most at risk.

These efforts will not only improve health outcomes for vulnerable populations, but also reduce healthcare costs to the state by reducing the frequency of emergency room visits related to respiratory health.

SUPPORT

Breathe Southern California (Co-sponsor)
Emphysema Foundation of America (Co-sponsor)
CA Society for Respiratory Care (Co-sponsor)
Healthy Air Alliance
Asian Pacific Islander Forward Movement
Community Clinic Association of LA County
Community Health Councils
Regional Asthma Management and Prevention

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¹ "Burden of COPD." World Health Organization, World Health Organization, 14 Sept. 2011.

² Meng, Ying-Ying & Drph, Melissa & Pickett, & Mph, & Induni, Marta & Ryan-Ibarra, Suzanne. (2011). Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease Burden in California and Southern California, 2011.

³ "Certain Medical Conditions and Risk for Severe COVID-19 Illness." Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

⁴ Serna, Joseph. "Wildfire smoke may carry 'mind-bending' amounts of fungi and bacteria, scientists say." LA Times, 1 February 2021.