



News Release

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Covered California Names Mary Watanabe New Chief Deputy Executive Director, External Outreach and Strategy

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — Covered California has announced Mary Watanabe as its new Chief Deputy Executive Director, External Outreach and Strategy.

In the role, Watanabe will lead Covered California's outreach, marketing, communications, and community engagement efforts statewide — overseeing the Outreach and Sales Marketing, Communications and Public Relations, and External Affairs and Community Engagement divisions. The role sets enterprise-wide strategy for how Covered California reaches, informs, and engages consumers and communities across the state, helping millions of Californians learn about, enroll in, and retain affordable health coverage. She will also serve as a key advisor to the Executive Director and Board on the organization's public presence and partnerships. She will report directly to the Executive Director.



Watanabe returns to Covered California, where she previously served as Deputy Director for the Sales Division from 2013 to 2015. During her initial tenure, she oversaw the implementation of the Navigator Grant Program, the Outreach and Education Grant Program, and the engagement of community partners to educate consumers and small business owners about the health care options available through Covered California.

“We are thrilled to welcome Mary back to Covered California to lead our efforts to reach, retain, and enroll Californians across the state,” said Covered California Executive Director Jessica Altman. “Mary has spent her extensive career fighting for equal access to affordable health care. Her experience, skills, and values will strengthen the work of Covered California to expand access to high-quality, affordable care.”

Following her first stint at Covered California, Watanabe served as the Deputy Director for Health Policy and Stakeholder Relations at the Department of Managed Health Care (DMHC), where she was responsible for fostering proactive and effective relations between the DMHC and its stakeholders, while serving as primary advisor to the Director on critical issues.

(more)

For the last six years, she has served as Director of the DMHC where she leads the department responsible for licensing health plans, assisting health plan members, actively monitoring health plan operations, and reviewing the financial stability of health plans and medical groups. In that role, she is responsible for regulating 139 plans and ensuring the 30 million Californians who receive health care coverage from a DMHC licensed plan have access to equitable, high-quality, timely, and affordable health care.

During Watanabe's time as Director, the DMHC nearly doubled in positions and budget authority as the Department took on new work to support the Governor's priorities and to implement new legislation. Watanabe led the DMHC's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, including issuing 50 All Plan Letters to ensure Californians had timely access to health care services, testing, and vaccinations. Her work also focused on increasing access to behavioral health services, including conducting focused behavioral health investigations of commercial health plans and enforcing state and federal mental health parity laws.

"I have spent my career in public service working to ensure all Californians have meaningful access to health care coverage. At a time when the coverage gains of the last decade are being threatened, it seems timely to return to the work that I care deeply about and that is at the heart of my passion for serving the diverse communities in California," said Watanabe. "I am excited to return to Covered California to lead the team responsible for ensuring Californians have the information and resources they need to enroll and retain their health care coverage."

Watanabe succeeds Doug McKeever, who is retiring after serving in the position since January 2017. The annual salary for Watanabe's position is \$325,008 annually, and she will officially start her new role November 16th.

About Covered California

Covered California is the state's health insurance marketplace, where Californians can find affordable, high-quality insurance from top insurance companies. Covered California is the only place where individuals who qualify can get financial assistance on a sliding scale to reduce premium costs. Consumers can then compare health insurance plans and choose the plan that works best for their health needs and budget. Depending on their income, some consumers may qualify for the low-cost or no-cost Medi-Cal program.

Covered California is an independent part of the state government whose job is to make the health insurance marketplace work for California's consumers. It is overseen by a five-member board appointed by the governor and the Legislature. For more information about Covered California, please visit www.CoveredCA.com.

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