Hospital emergency departments (EDs) are a vital component of California’s health care system

- EDs provide necessary medical care to all
- ED use is a focus of policymakers, payers, and providers
  - High cost relative to other settings
  - Serves as proxy for lack of access to primary care
  - Policy responses often focus on avoidable visits and “frequent flyers”
- ACA coverage expansions have raised questions about ED use
  - Medi-Cal beneficiaries have high ED usage rates
ED use has increased over the past decade
Outpatient ED use increased across all groups

Female, 19–34
Senior, 65 and older
Female, 35–64
Child, under 19
Male, 19–34
Male, 35–64
Many never visit an ED—others make a disproportionate share of visits

Distribution of ED visits by frequency of ED use, adults under age 65, 2016

- 65% of patients account for 25.6% of visits
- 30.9% of patients account for 16.5% of visits
- 10.7% of patients account for 7.8% of visits
- 1.9% of patients account for 1.1% of visits
- 0% of patients account for 0% of visits
Medi-Cal now covers half of outpatient ED visits for adults under 65

Payer source for outpatient ED visits made by non-elderly adults, 2005–2016
Did the ACA coverage expansions contribute to increasing ED use?

- Trends of increasing ED use pre-date the ACA
- We find no evidence that ACA coverage expansions contributed to increased ED use
- Analysis of all 58 counties suggests ED use would have been higher if not for the ACA coverage expansions
  - Counties most affected by coverage expansions saw less of an increase in ED visits than would be expected
Looking forward

- Continued growth in ED use raises concerns
- Medi-Cal program and managed care plans play a key role in slowing the upward trend in ED use
- Policy initiatives focus on heavy users, addressing behavioral health and other social factors
  - Whole Person Care Pilots
  - Health homes
  - Drug Medi-Cal redesign and behavioral health integration efforts
Emergency Department Use in California

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Notes on the use of these slides

These slides were created to accompany a presentation. They do not include full documentation of sources, data samples, methods, and interpretations. To avoid misinterpretations, please contact:

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Thank you for your interest in this work.