

Editorial: Prop. 4 provides sound spending on 13 children's hospitals

Ballot measure will help ensure the state's sickest children get the quality care citizens should demand

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It was Nelson Mandela, the former president of South Africa, who observed “there can be no keener revelation of a society’s soul than the way in which it treats its children.”

California’s 13 children’s hospitals, which receive more than 2 million visits every year from the state’s sickest children, each require investments of \$30 million to \$50 million a year to meet the expectations of quality care citizens should demand.

Donations and revenues from services don’t come close to meeting that need. Proposition 4 on the November ballot helps fill the gap. The \$1.5 billion state bond measure would provide grants over a 15-year period for construction, expansion, renovation and equipment for California’s children’s hospitals, which include Palo Alto’s Lucile Packard Children’s Hospital and Oakland’s UCSF Benioff Children’s Hospital.

Californians should vote yes on Nov. 6.

Prop. 4 builds on two bond measures California voters approved in 2004 and 2008 for \$750 million and \$980 million, respectively.

Oakland’s children’s hospital used the \$173 million it received from the two previous bond measure for a new pediatric outpatient clinic facility; an electronic medical records system; and other items, including ventilators, diagnostic imaging equipment and an inpatient pharmacy robot that loads, stores and delivers drugs.

Despite those upgrades, parts of the Oakland hospital are more than 100 years old. They need to be rebuilt to meet the state’s seismic mandate, established after the 1994 Northridge earthquake that resulted in \$3 billion damage to hospitals. Oakland hospital officials are working on a master plan that would use its Prop. 4 funds to help refurbish the existing facility.

The \$173 million in funding Lucile Packard received from the 2004 and 2008 propositions provided nearly 15 percent of the money for its new \$1.2 billion facility. But Packard still has major needs. Among its priorities is upgrading and updating its 74-bed neonatal intensive care unit (NICU), a project that carries an estimated \$200 million price tag. The current NICU is nearly 30 years old and has a single, large-room design that was popular when built but is now outdated.

Packard needs a NICU with individual rooms that provide a quieter environment in which parents can stay with their babies. Both promote care and better outcomes for infants fighting for their lives.

California's 11 other children's hospitals face their own challenges. But they all are focused on the same mission: making use of the latest breakthroughs in medicine to help our most vulnerable children grow and thrive.

The bonds issued under Prop. 4 would be repaid from the state's general fund. The Legislative Analyst's Office estimates the cost of a 35-year repayment to be about \$80 million annually. California has set a goal of keeping debt service for its general obligation bonds below 6 percent of general fund revenues. The LAO reports that even if all of the bonds proposed for the 2018 ballot pass, the servicing debt would still be less than 5 percent.

Voters should make a sound investment in California's children's hospitals by voting yes on Proposition 4.