

Health care reform protestors, extremist radio and television talkers and some mainstream Republicans trying to kill President Obama's [health care reform](#) initiative have frequently, but falsely, claimed the health plan would create government "[death panels](#)" to decide who gets treatment and who dies.

(Click [here](#) to find out the truth behind other big lies about health care reform.)

What these defenders of the private health insurance industry don't say is that those panels already exist. But they are not operated by the government—they are run by the private health insurance industry itself.

New data from the California Nurses Association/National Nurses Organizing Committee ([CNA/NNOC](#)) finds that more than 20 percent of medical claims for insured patients, even when recommended by the patients' doctors, are

rejected by California's largest private insurers, amounting to very real death panels in practice daily in the nation's biggest state.

The union analyzed data reported by the insurers to the California Department of Managed Care. From 2002 through June 30, 2009, the six largest insurers operating in California rejected 31.2 million claims for care—21 percent of all claims. Says Deborah Burger, RN, CNA/NNOC co-president:

With all the dishonest claims made by some politicians about alleged "death panels" in proposed national legislation, the reality for patients today is a daily, cold-hearted rejection of desperately needed medical care by the nation's biggest and wealthiest insurance companies simply because they don't want to pay for it.

According to the CNA/NNOC survey, in just the first six months of 2009, PacifiCare denied 40 percent of all California claims. Cigna rejected one-third of all claims and California Blues rejected 28 percent of claims for the first half of 2009. Says Burger:

Every claim that is denied represents a real patient enduring pain and suffering. Every denial has real, sometimes fatal consequences.

For example, PacifiCare, says CNN/NNOC, denied a special procedure for treatment of bone cancer for Nick Colombo, a 17-year-old teen from Placentia, Calif. After protests organized by Nick's family and friends, CNA/NNOC and netroots activists, PacifiCare reversed its decision. But the delay resulted in critical time lost, and Nick ultimately died. Says his older brother Rickey:

This was his last effort and the procedure had worked before with people in Nick's situation.

Burger says the United States is only is the only industrialized country where, "human lives are sacrificed for private profit."

CNA/NNOC will release the full study next week at its convention in San Francisco, where participants will hear from a panel of nurse leaders in Canada, Great Britain and Australia who will explode the myths about their national healthcare systems.