

# Budget cuts jeopardize elder care program

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ElderLife, an adult day health care program run by Kern Medical Center for senior and disabled adults, is on the chopping block.

Kern County supervisors voted Monday to set a future public hearing where they could terminate the program.

State budget cuts will strip the program, which serves about 40 people in Kern County, from the list of services offered under Medi-Cal in December. Paul Hensler, KMC's chief executive officer, said lawsuits have been filed against the state to block the cut.

But, if that court action is unsuccessful, the financial burden of continuing ElderLife here would fall on Kern County.

Supervisors struggled with the idea of picking up the about \$600,000 in costs the state formerly carried.

They said it would be hard to commit to spending so much money -- the total cost to the county would jump to around \$1.15 million annually -- to support only 40 people.

Discussion of the program came after supervisors reviewed the county-owned hospital's financial condition and discussed an anticipated \$2 million hit to KMC's budget from the state shift of non-serious prison inmates, and their medical care, to California counties.

State cuts to adult day health care services were just another example of the state shift of costs to counties, they said.

Supervisors struggled with justifying the cost for those services.

"If I maintain the quality of life for a group of 40, I don't know what I'm doing to the quality of life of 400 or 4,000," said Supervisor Jon McQuiston.

Lito Morillo, interim director of Kern County Aging & Adult Services, said the adults are provided two meals, socialization and rehabilitative care.

Morillo said if the ElderLife program is cut, those participants will likely end up in skilled nursing homes.

Hensler said Medi-Cal will then pick up the cost of caring for those people at a much more expensive rate than it pays to keep the doors open at ElderLife.

"The state will incur a greater cost because they are being short-sighted," Supervisor Mike Maggard said.

A public hearing on official cuts to the program will be scheduled for a later hearing of the Kern County Board of Supervisors.

Supervisors, Maggard said, should expect to see agony in the faces of the adult children of ElderLife participants who will inevitably show up to protest elimination of the program.