

Loss of day health care will affect many ailing adults

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Earlier this year, state lawmakers eliminated adult day health care as an optional Medi-Cal benefit, saving the state double-digit millions of dollars to help close the budget deficit.

Now with state funding expected to end Dec. 1, many adult day care centers will have to turn away 90 percent of their patients, according to Los Angeles County health officials.

Those patients, they say, will go to institutions, hospitals, nursing homes or skilled nursing facilities.

In San Bernardino County, 430 adults attend day health care programs funded by Medi-Cal, with another 244 receiving in-home supportive services through the county's Department of Aging and Adult Services.

Moreover, 17 of the state's 300 adult day care centers have closed their doors.

"All lawmakers know is that it's (\$85 million savings) a year. They don't know what adult day care centers are or what they do for people or how it helps them," said Arthur Issaian, program director at Health Guard Inland in Upland.

Assemblywoman Mariko Yamada, D-Davis, sent a letter in late August to Toby Douglas, the director of the Department of Health Care Services, which is charged with the oversight and implementation of transitioning the 35,000 clients out of ADHC and into other comparable and appropriate services.

The letter asks Douglas to exercise his authority to extend the adult day health care Medi-Cal optional benefit until March 31, "including any federal clearance necessary to do so."

"Such an extension would allow the Legislature to review the transition plan, assess the proper notification compliance, ensure availability of replacement services, and allow for uninterrupted delivery of those services," Yamada's letter reads.

Assemblyman Isadore Hall, D-Compton, wrote a letter on his own behalf to Douglas, and both Assemblywoman Norma Torres, D-Chino, and Wilmer Amina Carter, D-Rialto, are among 35 other Assembly members who signed Yamada's letter.

Already, \$85 million has been set aside to transition some participants to a private managed care company, or to services such as In-Home Supportive Services, which pays caretakers to do nonmedical chores for home-bound seniors. But Issaian argues that nursing homes or other places may not give the adults the attention they deserve.

"They don't provide many or any activities, and if (patients) don't get physical activity they will deteriorate," he said.

For five days a week, four hours a day, Health Guard Inland provides its patients with an nurse, occupational therapist, social workers, activity coordinators, an assistant to help those in wheelchairs, and meals designed by a dietitian.

Transportation is also provided to and from patients' homes. Health Guard Inland helps about 45 people.

"The nurse takes the vital signs for all the patients and we keep a record of it," he said. "Otherwise, if you can imagine, if this patient is at home and their blood pressure is low, they may not know what is going on, so they'll panic, call 9-1-1 and wait for an ambulance only to find out their blood pressure is low. Here we would be able to give them some orange juice to bring it up, keep an eye out on them, and keep them calm."

Issaian said his facility has patients who are dealing with depression, schizophrenia, anxiety and dementia, in addition to physical ailments.

The facility has written a letter to Gov. Jerry Brown and to state legislators, with more than 200 signatures, advocating against the decision to end the funding.

"Most people in wheelchairs cannot take care of themselves, and I tried to say that in the letter to the governor. You have to keep it open because people with disabilities do need this," said Lee Mason, 43, a day care patient.