

Yolo adult health center to remain open after Darling signs settlement

By GEOFF JOHNSON/And The Associated Press

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With a quick signature on Thursday, Woodland resident Esther Darling, 74, secured the future of the Yolo County Adult Day Health Center and bought at least a temporary reprieve for other centers across the state.

As the lead plaintiff and one of seven Adult Day Health Care clients in Darling et al v. Douglas et al., her signature confirmed a settlement with the state, rescuing care centers from the brink of extinction. Under the settlement, adult day health services were spared a Dec. 1 closure and instead will operate up through Feb. 29, after which they'll be eligible for funding under a different system.

For Darling, who suffered a stroke 17 years ago and lives near the center, the stakes were personal.

"I was always lonely until I came here," she said. "This is my home away from home. This is my family."

Program proponents argue the centers save money by providing everything short of full-time, rest-home care, allowing clients access to a complex array of nursing services and therapy without the costs of housing them.

Dawn Purkey, program manager at the center, said she expected all or almost all of her Medi-Cal clients -- about 60 -- will qualify under the new standards set by the Community Based Adult Services program, which will take the place of the current care program.

What changes will take place will be behind the scenes, she said. In the case of Yolo County, that means the center will switch from Medi-Cal funding to working with a nonprofit health care provider. That provider, in turn, will receive additional reimbursements from the state.

"CBAS will be Adult Day Health Care," she said. "Tere really is no difference between Adult Day Health Care and CBAS."

The story may not have as happy an ending outside Woodland. State officials say they expect about half the 35,000 medically fragile seniors that currently qualify for care to make it into the new program.



Yolo Adult Day Health Center Program Manager Dawn Purkey gives Esther Darling a kiss on the cheek. As the lead plaintiff in Darling et al. v. Douglas et al., Darling's signature was required to save adult care centers throughout the state. (Deo Ferrer/ Democrat)

"This (new program has) very defined, very stringent eligibility standards," said Norman Williams, a spokesman for the Department of Health Care Services. "We're making sure people are getting the services they need and the state is giving them the services they think are appropriate."

That's better than nothing, said Lydia Missaelides, executive director for California Association for Adult Day Services.

"The solution they came up with is complex but I think it's doable, given how much work has already gone into preparing people for transition and elimination," Missaelides said.

"The settlement ensures that even in these challenging economic times, critical community-based services will be preserved, and low-income seniors and people with disabilities will avoid unnecessary hospitalization or institutionalization," Disability Rights California lawyer Elissa Gershon said.

A major shift in the program's operation is that it will be administered through managed care Medi-Cal programs, such as Kaiser Permanente, Health Net and L.A. Care Health Plan, Missaelides said.

Patients in rural areas will be able to continue getting care at local centers, which will bill the state for each use of the benefit, called fee-for-service.

Those who no longer qualify for care will meet with care coordinators to find community-based services, transportation services, in-home support services and whatever else they may need to continue living independently, Missaelides said.

Some adult day health care centers may still close because of the drop in the number of qualified patients in the program, she said.

ADHC supporter and Assemblymember Bob Blumenfield, D-San Fernando Valley, praised the agreement, saying losing the centers was "a nightmare scenario" for many seniors.

"This settlement is also great news for our state budget," Blumenfield said. "We were about to spend more to provide health care for less people."

It costs the state roughly \$1,050 per month for every ADHC enrollee, compared with \$5,193 per month per person cared for by a nursing home, he said.