

Speak up for adult day health care

By Peggy Phelps

What do we do? What does it take to get our state legislators and governor to put people's lives ahead of "things"?

Our state budget should reflect the values of the people in this state. How many thousands of people does it take to convince the governor not to "throw the baby out with the bath water"?

I am referring to the elimination of adult day health center services to our disabled and frail, elderly adults, especially those who are 60 to 90 years of age and are poor. If they had the means to hire private care for themselves, they would do so. But they are at the mercy of the "village" and those leaders who, for the most part, have not walked in their shoes.

The governor, to his credit, is trying to cut state spending, but by eliminating ADHC as a Medi-Cal benefit, he is leading the charge to eliminate a program that the state implemented approximately 30 years ago to save Medi-Cal dollars.

The mission of the 300-plus adult day health centers in the state is to avoid unnecessary and expensive emergency room visits and hospitalizations of our most fragile and medically needy citizens.

They do not have private health insurance to cover their medical expenses, and Medicare does not cover many necessary services.

Therefore, they wait until a crisis, which is then taken care of by Medi-Cal.

It seems only logical that using ADHC program services will save Medi-Cal dollars *and* will delay or avoid placement in skilled nursing facilities, a much more expensive cost to the state.

The state legislators see the benefit of ADHC program services, but they are not following through on their commitment to save the program through other means. They listened to their constituents and passed AB 96, which would have allowed the Medi-Cal benefit to continue under a federal waiver program. This would have cut back ADHC programs, but would have given centers an opportunity to develop other funding streams.

Adult day health center programs should be part of the overall health care reform discussion. Currently, our priority is to keep centers open. If centers close because of inadequate funding, not only will frail, elderly patients “fall through the cracks,” but small businesses that employ many employees and purchase items from vendors in the community will be lost. And the state will lose its original investment.

What can the community do? I think we have to protect our beloved elders and it starts with speaking for them. We all have parents, spouses, grandparents and other family members who will need caregiving at some time in their lives. Call your legislator’s office; insist that they override the governor’s veto. It’s not a prudent political move, but one that takes intestinal fortitude.

Speak up for our elderly. Save their lives. Don’t assume that someone else is doing it.

For more information and updates, visit the California Association for Adult Day Services website (www.caads.org). Get informed. Share your concerns with whomever will listen.

— *Peggy Phelps is a Woodland resident.*