

# EDITORIAL: California can't afford not to save its adult health centers

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Saint Agnes Adult Day Health Center in Fresno has announced it will close on Aug. 8. That means 89 elderly and disabled patients will be without medical, nutritional and therapeutic care. Adult day-care health programs provide places for fragile adults to socialize and exercise. Nurses monitor their health needs. Physical therapists keep them moving. Patients share meals, play games, garden or just talk.

Part of the state's Medi-Cal system, adult day health care was designed to keep such fragile adults in their own homes and out of even more expensive nursing homes. It also provides much-needed respite to family caregivers.

In his original budget proposal, Gov. Jerry Brown sought to eliminate adult day health care as a Medi-Cal benefit and to transition patients to more narrowly targeted, home-based services.

But even as the Saint Agnes Adult Day Health Center and scores of facilities like it face closure, advocates are waging a last-ditch fight to preserve at least some vestige of the program. It's well worth the effort.

Assembly Bill 96 by Assemblyman Bob Blumenfield, D-Van Nuys, would authorize the state to submit a waiver application to the federal government to reconfigure adult-day health care into a new "Keeping Adults Free from Institutions" program. The waiver would smooth the flow of federal funds on a dollar-for-dollar match with the state to help keep adult day health centers open.

In addition to Blumenfield's bill, the Legislature has thus far kept \$85 million in the budget to keep the adult day health care infrastructure in place. It's half of what the state spent on such programs last year, but changes in the way the program is structured would allow some facilities to remain open.

This is not just a plea to save one more threatened worthy program. Adult day health care is cost-effective. Without facilities like this, most of the 35,000 patients served by the program would likely end up in more expensive nursing homes or hospital emergency rooms. The state health-care system doesn't have the capacity to absorb all of them.

One study estimates that elimination of adult day care would end up costing the state \$51 million more than it saves.

On Wednesday, the state Assembly passed Blumenfield's bill, which now goes to the governor. The fate of the \$85 million appropriation depends on the outcome of the state's difficult budget negotiations. Both are justified on economic and moral grounds.