



Another blow to the poor, another call for help

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Jewish social services agencies have long warned of the harm relentless state and federal budget cuts would cause to the most vulnerable among us.

It turns out they were right.

When the state eliminated funding for adult day health care centers, the S.F.-based Jewish Family and Children's Services was left with no choice: Its L'Chaim Adult Day Health Center will close Dec. 1.

As our story on page 2a makes clear, this means up to 400 poor, frail, elderly Jews will no longer have a place to go for social interaction, nutritious meals and medical supervision.

They are basically on their own, though JFCS has not given up on its clients. Volunteers will make house calls.

Similarly, the Jewish Home in San Francisco has had to temporarily halt admission of long-term residents. That is a blow to those seeking a Jewish nursing home in San Francisco; where will they go now?

These stories will be repeated across the nation. As the recent debt ceiling debate in Washington, D.C., showed, America is bitterly divided over questions of government, its proper size and role.

And while politicians bicker, the poor lose. Medicare and Social Security have been spared for now, but Congress authorized \$550 billion in immediate cuts to discretionary domestic spending. How that will play out is anyone's guess, but already known is a 50 percent reduction in Community Services Block Grants to the states — which fund food, housing, utility assistance and job training programs.

It is no exaggeration to say people will die because of these draconian cuts.

We Jews pride ourselves, and rightfully so, on our communal spirit. For generations we have sworn by the credo "Kol Yisrael areveim zeh l'zeh," meaning all Jews are responsible for one another.

That spirit endures. JFCS will soon put out the call for \$500,000 in emergency funds to help ameliorate the problem. No doubt our community will respond.

But some tasks — especially in a faltering economy — are too big for charities, too big for social service agencies, too big for corporate social responsibility departments.

We must decide what kind of country we want. Do we want a society in which taxes may be low, but suffering is widespread? Or do we want a society where we collectively shoulder the burden to help our most vulnerable citizens?

In an era where big government has become the overriding problem for many, such concerns may slip down the ladder of priorities.

That would be an American tragedy.

Yes, we should give tzedakah generously. But we cannot on our own ever give enough.