

## Elderly poor left without options in California

After removal of the Adult Day Health Care program that sector of the population is vulnerable

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2011-07-27

SACRAMENTO .- For Stella Higuera Colombia, 63, suffering from arthritis, high blood pressure, kidney transplantation and knees replaced, going three times a week to a health care center during the day (Adult Day Health Center) represents "the other half of his life."

"Here I'm given treatments, therapies, food and counseling to avoid falling into depression," said Stella, who goes three times a week to Yolo Adult Day Health Center in Woodland, 15 miles northwest of Sacramento.

"These centers are our guide for community resources, learning activities, it is sometimes better than we have in the family home and I am very shocked and praying that my center is not going away," said Stella.

In order to save 170 million dollars to the state, Governor Jerry Brown killed the program Adult Day Health Care (ADHC), which has more than 300 centers around the state where it provides services to 37,000 elderly who suffer from disabilities and chronic illnesses ranging from heart disease to Down syndrome, schizophrenia, Alzheimer's, dementia, bipolar disorder or who are victims of accidents.

In a community setting, patients receive treatments, language, social, food and transportation.

After removal of the ADHC, the Democratic Assemblyman Robert Blumenfield, Van Nuys, proposed the bill AB96 which would have created the program to support keeping the elderly out of institutions (KAFI) to care for the medically fragile at half the cost the ADHC.

Lawmakers allocated \$85 million for this program in the budget approved last month. However, that measure was vetoed by the governor this week.

"We have a serious problem in front of us, thousands of adult patients who go to these centers and their families do not know what will happen to their future. This tremendous insecurity is a nightmare," said Blumenfield.

Governor Brown said in his veto that AB96 created a program similar to ADHC and therefore is unnecessary and inappropriate.



Activistas y adultos mayores protestaban en febrero pasado frente al Capitolio en Sacramento. Pedían no cancelar el cuidado médico para los ancianos sin recursos que viven en el estado. **Araceli Martínez/La Opinión**

"It addresses the immediate need for transition of beneficiaries of ADHC to other community services to meet their needs," he argued. He added, however, that he gave the ADHC centers until December 1st to ensure the transition to other services.

The problem, according to representatives of ADHC centers is that the poor elderly with chronic disabilities are left without options.

The Department of Health Care works within a health plan, but supporters of ADHC are not satisfied.

"There has been no productive meeting, and there is a profound lack of willingness on the part of management to explore new options and ideas," said Lydia Missaelides, director of the California Association for Adult Day Services (CAADS).

She revealed so far, 17 facilities have closed and 95% are expected to close by December, while their survey predicts that 26% of patients will go to nursing homes but two thirds of them have said they have no availability of beds.

Of the 17 elderly day care facilities that closed, seven are in the Los Angeles area, specifically in Glendale, Van Nuys, Reseda, Alhambra, Monterey Park and Compton.

It costs the state \$1,050 per month to keep a person in the ADHC centers, compared to \$5,193 per month per person in a nursing home. Patients attend an average of three days a week to these day care centers. Stella attends three days from 10:00 am to 2:00 pm

According Blumemfield, if 20% of patients go to nursing homes, the savings projected in the budget with the elimination of ADHC disappear.

Nina Nolcox, Graceful Senescence downtown Los Angeles, said they are very concerned that 21% of patients in the centers of the city and county will be thrown into the street.

"We are anticipating that most of these centers' elderly will saturate emergency rooms, there will be more hospitalizations and abuse of individuals suffering from diseases such as Alzheimer's or other dementia, and it is very likely they'll stay home alone without anyone to care for them," she said.

Elissa Gershon, a lawyer for Disability Rights California organization that sued the state last June over the elimination of ADHC, said a judge postponed a hearing scheduled for yesterday to November 1, 30 days before the state eliminates the ADHC centers.

The demand is for 37,000 patients and seeks to ensure that low-income people with disabilities, including the elderly and those with Alzheimer's, are not injured and hospitalized or sent to nursing homes.