



Governor's budget plan puts senior health program at risk

By DONNA JONES - Santa Cruz Sentinel

Posted: 01/11/2011 08:23:28 PM PST

Updated: 01/11/2011 08:29:53 PM PST

SANTA CRUZ - At 85, Juvencio Haro, hard of hearing and confined to wheelchair after a spinal cord injury in a bicycle accident 30 years ago, can no longer take care of himself.

Despite needing round-the-clock assistance, the former field worker has been able to stay in his own home thanks to the support of his family and Elderday, an adult day health care center near Harvey West.

For Haro and many others like him, who depend on the centers that care for the frail and elderly, that could change.

Gov. Jerry Brown, trying to figure a way out of a \$28 billion budget hole, has proposed eliminating funding for the centers as part of \$1.7 billion cut to Medi-Cal.

The proposal places at risk the centers that provide medical, therapeutic and nutritional services to more than 30,000 frail and elderly people across California.

If Elderday were to close, director Sheri Anselmi said as many as a third of its 140 clients would end up in skilled nursing facilities. Elderday is run by Salud Para La Gente, which receives \$80 per day for each client, \$38 of which comes from the state for those on Medi-Cal.

"If this goes, it's going to leave a void," Anselmi said.

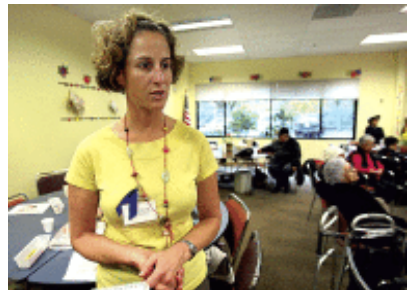
It doesn't make sense for the people who are getting the care, for their family caregivers who need the break during the day to work or to the taxpayer who will have to shoulder the more expensive burden of full-time nursing home care, Anselmi said.

It might not even be legal, according to disability rights advocates.

Previous attempts by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger to reduce or restrict services ran into trouble when a federal judge issued preliminary injunctions, finding the new rules violated federal disability and Medicaid law. The state's appeal is pending in the Ninth Circuit.



Quality day care for 140 seniors and disabled from throughout the county may... (Dan Coyro/Sentinel)



"By eliminating the program instead of cutting back, they don't necessarily violate Medicaid law, but it will violate Americans with Disabilities Act," said Elissa Gershon, senior attorney with Oakland-based Disability Rights California. "It's really a misguided and illegal attempt to cut services to people who need them to avoid being put into nursing homes."

Haro's daughter, Maribel Haro, said her family wouldn't put her father into a nursing home no matter what the state does.

But she said keeping him home without the support of Elderday will strain already taxed family resources. Ten of his children and grandchildren rotate on a schedule designed to ensure he's never alone. Even at night, they get up to turn him in bed. If Elderday were to close, one or more of them might have to give up their jobs, she said.

For Haro, that might not be a choice since she works at Elderday too. A licensed vocational nurse, she dispenses medications, performs treatments and monitors conditions such as high blood pressure and diabetes.

It's a job she doesn't want to lose, but she's more worried about the impact on her father. She said Elderday doesn't just provide him services, but also is a big part of his life. Juvencio Haro said he enjoys the people, the activities and especially playing dominoes.

Last year, when he had to stay home from Elderday to recuperate from an illness, he became very depressed, his daughter said.

"He stopped eating. He stopped talking," Haro said. "As soon as he came back (to Elderday), everything was OK."