

OPINION - BEE EDITORIALS

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A win-win for state and elderly

Until last week, Adult Day Health Care, a vital state program that helps keep frail elderly in their homes and out of expensive nursing homes, was headed for extinction. Because of state budget cuts, some 300 centers across the state, including Miller's Place in Modesto, were to close this week.

The threatened closures made no sense either on fiscal or humanitarian grounds. The state's burgeoning populations of fragile adults go to these centers to socialize and exercise. Nurses monitor their health and physical therapists keep them moving. Patients play games, garden or just talk, and their exhausted caregivers at home get a break.

Adult day care got an 11th-hour reprieve. It took two years and a federal lawsuit, but the state agreed to start a similar community-based program. While reimbursement will switch from a fee for service to a managed care model, the services for most of the elderly, low-income adults will endure.

Bureaucrats will be scrambling to put new eligibility rules in place and perform new patient assessments, but if things go as intended, most patients won't notice.

State officials predict caseloads will drop by about half because of more stringent eligibility. Providers disagree. They believe most of the people served today will continue to receive services. That's the case at Miller's Place; leaders there believe most of its 80 clients will be eligible for the new program.

While there will have to be drastic cuts in state spending, eliminating adult day health care was an unreasonable plan.

The federal lawsuit, filed on behalf of patients by attorneys with Disability Rights California, argued that by eliminating the program without adequate replacement services the state was placing thousands of patients at risk for institutionalization in violation of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

In recent weeks, it became clear that the state was likely to lose in court. State officials working with advocates for the elderly and disabled reached a settlement, a rare win for both sides but mostly for frail, elderly Californians and their families.