

Brown's Countdown, Day 78: California adult day care saved but must shrink

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Bob Benson, 67, who has cerebral palsy, takes light rail to the Rancho Cordova Adult Day Health Care program and receives physical therapy there. Such facilities might be in jeopardy as the state reviews client eligibility guidelines as the result of budget cuts to adult day care programs.

For more than two months, [Bob Benson](#) and tens of thousands of disabled and elderly Californians had prepared for the worst.

Their fears began in January when Gov. [Jerry Brown](#) proposed eliminating all state support – or \$176 million – for adult [day health care](#) programs, which provide medical attention to people often confined to their homes.

Then, over the following weeks, legislators began putting the program back together. Last week, Benson and other service users won a reprieve – of sorts.

Brown signed legislation that scaled back the original cuts by half but left unknown how to shrink adult [day health care](#) to meet the new dollar amount.

Benson, 67, received the news with both relief and concern. He has cerebral palsy and takes [light rail](#) to the Rancho Cordova Adult [Day Health Care](#) program as often as three times a week.

Keeping such centers open not only ensures people receive medical care, he said, but gives housebound people one of their few chances to interact with the outside world.

"This keep me physically active," Benson said. "It gets me out with people. It's not good to just let people be at home by themselves."

The program was one of many facing the budget ax as the state grapples with a \$26.6 billion deficit.

The governor and [Legislature](#) came up with the alternative plan after advocates, consumers and their relatives jammed the Capitol with protests and impassioned testimony.

In a way, the state is rebuilding the program from scratch by letting legislators set new standards for who can receive care.

The plan zeros out funding for the program tagged for optional Medi-Cal purposes and instead allocates \$85 million in other Medi-Cal money for a new program called Keeping Adults from Institutions. The state would need a federal waiver letting the state use those other Medi-Cal funds, which the federal government would match.

The Governor's Office says the program serves 27,000 people. The [California Association for Adult Day Services](#) puts the number at 37,000.

"The program will be smaller, patients will be discharged and centers will be closing," said [Lydia Missaelides](#), the association's executive director.

"The budget's been cut in half. You know that means a significant number of patients will be displaced. We just don't know how many, where or when."

Assemblyman [Bob Blumenfield, D-Woodland Hills](#), who's helping lead the effort to redesign the program, said the process will likely take weeks to finish after service users and other stakeholders provide input.

"You have to figure out a way where there'd be less people in the program," Blumenfield said. "Medical acuity is the yardstick."

Adding to the mix, more cuts could be on the way if Brown fails to win more [tax revenue](#).

That uncertainty has left [service providers](#) such as Rancho Cordova Adult [Day Health Care](#) in limbo, as they await word about who will be kept in and out, said the center's administrator, [Judy Canterbury](#).

Her center already cares for people with acute disabilities, which means it might not see many changes, she said. Nonetheless, like centers all over the state, Canterbury's is wrestling with the unknown.

"We don't want to see people drop through the cracks and wind up in skilled nursing facilities, which cost a lot more money," Canterbury said. "It leaves us in a quandary as to what we're going to do with some of our people."