

Salud works to save Elderday after funding loss: Medi-Cal elimination will cost the Santa Cruz adult health care center \$2.2 million

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WATSONVILLE - Salud Para La Gente plans to keep open its adult day health care center, Elderday, despite the loss of the bulk of its funding Dec. 1.

Elderday, on Pioneer Street in Santa Cruz, cares for 80 to 90 seniors from across Santa Cruz County each day, monitoring chronic health problems and supplying meals, therapy and social interaction. For some, it's the only thing that stands between them and admission into a skilled nursing facility. For others, Elderday allows their primary caregivers, typically family members, to hold paying jobs.

But Medi-Cal payments, which represent about 90 percent of Elderday's funding, are being eliminated as part of the state budget passed in June. Advocates predict few if any of the 300 centers in the state will survive, leaving 37,000 seniors and their families scrambling for help and 7,000 workers out of work. Already, 17 centers have shut their doors.

Salud is working on a plan to avoid that fate.

"It's one heck of a challenge, but it's a top priority for our board," said Marc Pimentel, board president.

The plan, which has yet to come before the board, is a "work in progress," said Salud spokeswoman Sara Clarenbach. She said it's likely to include scaled-backed services and financing through fees and grants.

"It won't be business as usual. It's clearly going to be something else," she said, adding it will have to appeal to people with the ability to pay, possibly on a sliding scale.

But the numbers reveal the financial challenge. Salud received \$2.2 million in Medi-Cal reimbursement for the Elderday program in the fiscal year that ended June 30, according to Clarenbach. Grant funding brought in \$173,623. Self-paying patients accounted for another \$86,585 and private insurance for \$7,830.

More than 90 percent of Elderday's clientele, who often are frail mentally or physically, are low-income patients who rely on Medi-Cal to cover the cost.

"We're looking very seriously at the importance of fundraising to get some extrinsic funding so we can make (services) available to patients who can't pay," Clarenbach said.