

# Proposed cuts threaten O.C. senior health care services – News ...

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Staff writer Courtney Perkes contributed to this report.

Roughly 37,000 seniors would be left without someone to provide physical therapy for them after a stroke, administer their medicine or play bingo with them at supervised health care centers if the governor's proposed budget cuts to Medi-Cal are approved.

Gov. Jerry Brown proposed a budget this week that calls for extending recent tax increases for five years and cutting \$12.5 billion in state spending by reducing funding for welfare, social services and higher education – an effort to close a projected \$25.4 billion deficit.

Cuts include \$1.5 billion from CalWORKS, \$750 million from the Department of Developmental Services, \$500 million each from the UC and the CSU systems and a \$1.7 billion cut to public insurance program Medi-Cal. The Medi-Cal cuts would eliminate adult day health care – a move providers in Orange County said would leave seniors and their families without affordable care.

There are 311 Adult Day Health Care service centers in the state, with 12 in Orange County.

Participants pay a set fee per day for care, which can be paid for through Medi-Cal, and attend day care three days a week on average for eight hours per day, according to the California Association for Adult Day Services. Centers provide a laundry list of services such as supervision from nurses, occupational therapy, physical therapy, speech therapy, social work, social activities and support groups for caregivers.

The primary goals of the centers are to help frail seniors and adults with disabilities care for themselves and stay out of nursing homes or similar institutional settings.

“We want to be able to keep these people active and give these people a quality of life,” said Marilyn Ditty, executive director of day care provider Age Well Senior Services in Laguna Woods.

Age Well Senior Services is a nonprofit based in Laguna Woods that provides adult day care for seniors in South County and operates programs like Meals on Wheels and adult

education classes via 13 centers in the county. Ditty said about 100 seniors at the Laguna Woods center could be without care as soon as July if the proposed cuts are approved.

“The elderly are being hit hard. Families are going to be stressed to take care of them at home,” Ditty said. “Unless (lawmakers) have a family member that is affected, they just don’t get it.”

Ditty said Age Well in Laguna Woods would not stay open without the reimbursements from Medi-Cal, which pay more than half the cost for services like adult day health care.

And without it, families may have to place elderly relatives into nursing homes or hospitals and day care costs would increase to at least five times what they are now, according to Lydia Missaelides, executive director of CAADS.

“They have no other choices excepted skilled nursing facilities,” said Gio Corzo, director of day care services for Community Senior Serv, which operates three senior centers in Orange County. Corzo said more than 400 seniors at the three centers in Buena Park, Santa Ana and Anaheim could be without day care. He said the cuts could also force family members to stay home to take care of aging relatives, creating economic hardships.

“It’s a complete domino effect,” Corzo said.

Disability rights advocates say they are concerned about the governor’s proposal. Since 2009, they have twice won court orders blocking the state from cutting ADHC services in violation of the federal Americans with Disabilities Act.

The most recent injunction was granted in February 2010, and the state’s appeal is pending, said Elissa Gershon, senior attorney for Disability Rights California.

“It’s been in the governor’s budget the last two years, and we’ve been able to fight it off and the Legislature hasn’t been willing to go along with eliminating the program,” Gershon said. “How the legislative process goes forward will determine what we think we can do and what we decide to do legally.”

If adult day care services need cutting, Ditty said she hopes it won’t be as drastic as the governor’s proposal. Ditty said an alternative might be to reduce the number of days seniors can attend a center to two from five to reduce costs.

Still, advocates aren’t taking any chances.

“It’s scaring our families and our participants every time this comes up,” Missaelides said. “Our providers are going to fight this tooth and nail.”