

## The elderly are already taking a hit

*By Orson Aguilar and Carla Saporta, August 31, 2011*



While national politicians argue about cuts to Social Security and Medicare down the road, cash-strapped state governments are cutting vital services for elderly Americans today. Those suffering most are often those with the least.

In California, budget cuts approved earlier this year mean the closure of some 300 adult day health centers. These centers serve 37,000 medically fragile elderly and disabled people — folks suffering from Alzheimer’s disease, stroke or other complications that make it impossible for them to function without assistance. The centers allow them to live a bearable life outside of a 24-hour institution. And they give the family members who care for them at home a desperately needed daytime respite.

While California’s situation may be the worst, it’s not unique. Washington state’s COPES (Community Options Program Entry System), which helps the frail elderly live at home, has also faced severe cuts, and there’s good reason to fear for similar efforts in other states.

The human misery that these cuts inflict doesn’t fall equally. One of the dirty little secrets of our supposedly “post-racial” society is that elderly African-Americans, Asian-Americans and Latinos are far less likely than whites to have the resources needed for a reasonably secure retirement.

The Greenlining Institute’s recent report, “The Economic Crisis Facing Seniors of Color,” uncovered some shocking statistics. An astonishing 91 percent of Latino and African-American seniors are financially vulnerable, and while data on Asian-Americans is less complete, seniors in some Asian ethnic groups have poverty rates three to four times that of whites. People of color have had a higher proportion of their wealth tied up in their homes, taking a disproportionate hit during the foreclosure crisis, and are also less likely to work for an employer who offers a retirement plan.

So the communities that have the least and have suffered the most during the economic downturn are being hit again by cuts to vital programs for their elderly and frail.

The final irony is that these cuts aren’t even cost-effective. Adult day health centers and similar services save money in the long run. They keep people out of nursing homes, which cost about two and a half times as much.

And by providing care during the day, they allow the adult children of elderly parents to keep working and paying taxes. Without these services, many caregivers will have no choice but to give up their jobs and go on welfare.

It’s a truism that the test of a society is how it cares for its most vulnerable. America is failing that test.

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Article also appeared:

9/2/2011 – *Sacramento Bee* – The elderly are already taking a hit

9/1/2011 – *Institute for America's Future* – The Elderly Are Already Taking A Hit

9/3/2011 – *North Iowa Today* – The elderly are already taking a hit

9/3/2011 – *CapeCod.com* – Orson Aguilar and Carla Saporta: The elderly are already taking a hit

9/4/2011 – *Silobreaker.com* – Orson Aguilar and Carla Saporta: The elderly are already taking a hit