

My Word: Cuts to cost-saving programs don't make sense

Joyce Hayes/For the Times-Standard
Posted: 01/22/2011 01:25:10 AM PST

On Jan. 10, Gov. Brown issued his proposed budget cuts to close the \$25 billion deficit. We all expected deep cuts in many programs and services but not the complete elimination of two programs that provide the last remaining safety net for the most frail elders in our community. These two programs are the Multi-purpose Senior Services Program (MSSP) and the Adult Day Health Care Program (ADHC). Both programs can clearly demonstrate cost savings for the state.

MSSP provides care management services for seniors aged 65 and older who are Medi-Cal eligible, who qualify for placement in a nursing facility and who wish to remain in the community. MSSP saves California taxpayers over \$100 million each year by keeping 12,600 chronically ill, disabled older adults in their home instead of a nursing home. These adults are medically and psychosocially more complex and needing more clinical support than IHSS can provide.

If ADHC were eliminated, the state would lose \$51 million in 2011-2012 according to a study by the nationally recognized Lewin Group. This is because: cost would merely shift to other more expensive care setting, 7,000 jobs would be eliminated, family caregivers would be forced to quit their jobs to care for the loved one, state business and income tax revenues would decline and the state would forfeit \$164 million annually in federal matching funds. ADHC is at least five times less costly to the state than placing these clients into nursing facilities. There

is no comparable medically supervised comprehensive care program under the Medi-Cal program for this population, except for the most costly nursing home facilities. This becomes even more of a significant problem when counties like Humboldt do not have enough beds to take Medi-Cal patients.

The impact of eliminating these programs cannot only be measured in cost savings but also in human suffering for the client and their family member or caregiver who is shouldering the burden of care. In most cases, adults in these programs prefer to remain in the community rather than be placed in a nursing home.

Over the last two years, the battle to eliminate ADHC has been fought in the courts as being illegal and violating the Americans with Disabilities Act. The state is charged with being unable to ensure the 37,000 people affected by program closures have uninterrupted access to alternative Medi-Cal services to prevent unnecessary institutionalization. Continued efforts to propose elimination will likely only end up in costly legal battles.

Obviously there needs to be cuts made in the budget, but does it make sense to eliminate programs that actually save the state money and at the same time provide a higher quality of life and dignity for our most frail elders?

Joyce Hayes is executive director of Humboldt Senior Resource Center.