

## **The Unkindest Cut: Adult Day Health Care**

Cindy Denbo/For the Times-Standard

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"In March, I, along with every other Democrat in the Assembly, voted to support Gov. Jerry Brown's proposal to eliminate the optional Adult Day Health Care (ADHC) benefit in California. It is a vote I regret daily." So says Assemblywoman Mariko Yamada, chair of the Assembly Committee on Aging and Long-Term Care since 2009. Since former Assemblywoman Patty Berg left the Assembly, Yamada is regarded as the legislator that knows the most -- and perhaps cares the most -- about California seniors and about the Boomers and Gen Xers who will be the next generations of California seniors. She knows. She pays attention. And, in Sacramento, she is fighting a lonely fight for the seniors of Humboldt County and California. She could use some help.

Adult Day Health Care serves approximately 55,000 seniors and people with disabilities each year, over 37,000 at any one time. In Humboldt County, 206 participants attend ADHC: 65 with dementia, 43 developmentally delayed, 141 requiring skilled nursing care. In March, Yamada and her fellow legislators voted for the destruction of one of the few remaining options for support and assistance for thousands of California seniors and their families.

According to Yamada, this vote was founded on the belief that a smaller program based on medical acuity would be provided to care for the low-income, elderly and disabled Californians currently in ADHC. Assemblyman Bob Blumenthal and others worked for months to develop.

"Keeping Adults Free from Institutions (KAFI)" to do just that. Three weeks ago, the governor vetoed AB 96, legislation that would have funded KAFI using already-budgeted funds supplemented with 100 percent federal matching funds. This scaled-down, less expensive program, which would have helped only the most needy of clients, vanished along with the confidence that good faith promises would be kept.

For almost 40 years, the people of California maintained a network of support for the most frail of California seniors. Part of the social contract, this support helped the most fragile among us remain living at home. It was developed and paid for by the generation that now finds itself on a path to nowhere, "transitioned" from ADHC, victims of a Sacramento determination to eliminate care that has evolved over decades and that has been the gold standard for the rest of the country. And it has been paid for by the children and grandchildren of today's seniors, who understood that they, too, may need help. This system was founded on the understanding that it would provide help for today's elderly, as well as the Boomer children of today's seniors, when they are in need, and eventually for the Gen X children of Boomers, when they require assistance. This is an option for care that is of vital benefit for all -- today's seniors, their children, their grandchildren.

And make no mistake, the elimination of ADHC will affect us all. Many seniors will find it impossible to remain living at home and will be forced into nursing homes -- at great personal cost to them and their families and at great economic cost to us all. A Congress of California Seniors study estimates the increased annual cost of premature institutionalization to the state of California will be \$51.6 million. The impact on families will be significant as the children of frail seniors struggle to provide assistance as they raise their own families and try to keep their own jobs while their retirement savings melt away.

The collateral damage to families, to retirement savings and college funds, to community resources already stretched painfully thin will be extensive: increased visits to hospital emergency rooms and by law enforcement, job and school absenteeism, isolation and fear experienced by secluded seniors, increased instances of elder abuse and fraud, premature entry into nursing homes, self-neglect, illness and, in some cases, death.

This is the latest -- and most damaging -- blow dealt by our governor and Legislature to the once-reliable and collaborative system of care for the fragile elderly. It is disappearing for the most vulnerable now. If it is destroyed, it will not be there for the huge and aging population of Boomers -- and it will not be there for their Gen X children, who will find their own futures compromised.

A massive breach of generational good faith, these actions are as irresponsible as they are short-sighted. Assemblywoman Yamada could use some help in this crucial fight for your future. She will convene an Assembly Committee on Aging and Long Term Care hearing at

2 p.m. today, Aug. 16, at the state Capitol to assess the costs and consequences of these closures. Call her. Call your legislators. Call Governor Brown at 916-445-2841.

Lillian Carter once said, "Sure I'm for helping the elderly. I'm going to be old myself someday." The survival of ADHC is about all of us ... today, tomorrow, someday.

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