



Senior suffer in latest state budget

By Sarah Rohrs / Times-Herald

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Low-income seniors take a hit in the new state budget, though reductions could be worse, advocates said.

Senior day health care programs which help frail elders and their caretakers undergo a 50 percent funding cut under the new state budget, officials said.

Further, funding is stripped to the "Multi-purpose Senior Services Program" (MSSP) which helps older adults stay in their home rather than live in state-funded nursing homes.

"It's not good. The problem is that the need is increasing and seniors on fixed incomes are still in need of services and there's more of them," Napa and Solano Area Agency on Aging Executive Director Leanne Martinsen said.

But losing half its funding is not the only change for the Adult Day Health Care program which gives low-income, frail seniors a place to go during the day for activities and health care while also giving their caregivers a break.

Two state-licensed centers exist in Solano and Napa counties, including the Solano Adult Day Health program in Vallejo.

Some seniors in Vallejo also are bused to the Napa Valley Hospice and Adult Day Services, program director Celine Regalia said.

Such programs help seniors stay mentally alert and active and give them a chance of living independently and in their homes longer, Senior Coalition of Solano County Coordinator Rochelle Sherlock said.

Day care programs also give family members and other caregivers much-needed breaks from constant care, Sherlock said.

Under a state bill included in the new state budget, the program will be eliminated and "reborn" under a different set of rules which could leave some low-income seniors out in the cold, California Association for Adult Day Services Executive Director Lydia Missaelides said.

Currently any low-income senior on Medical qualifies for adult day health care services, Missaelides said. Under the new rules, the state will have more control and ability to restrict services to only the neediest of the seniors, she said.

"Fewer people will be served for half of the money," Missaelides said.

Because the seniors utilizing the program are low-income, they unlikely would be able to afford to pay full price for the day care services, Regalia said. The state reimburses centers \$76.27 per day per senior, she said.

While worried about the numbers of seniors who could be left out, Missaelides said the new service "beats the alternative which was complete elimination of the program with no lifeline at all."

"This allows centers throughout the state to remain in place," Missaelides said.

The new program, called Keeping Adults Free From Institutions (KAFFI), and its guidelines could impact hundreds of seniors in Solano and Napa counties, plus the 37,000 elderly adults statewide, Missaelides said.

Senior advocates will analyze exactly how the new program will work, plus other funding cuts, including a a \$2.5 million cut to the multi-purpose senior services program, said Amy Jenkins, Solano County legislative, intergovernmental & public affairs officer.

Locally, the program would lose 12.5 percent of its funding and ability to serve 22 of its 180 clients, Martinsen said.

The idea behind the program is to provide community services at home to low-income seniors who are in need of skilled nursing care, Sherlock said.

Case managers would link elders to any services they might need to stay healthy and living at home at a cost which likely would be lower than state-funded nursing homes, she said.

Without the program, such seniors might need to go into nursing homes which accept Medical, though there are too few such facilities and the waiting list for beds is long, officials said.

"The ultimate goal is to allow people to live independently in their own home," Sherlock said.

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