

THE Willits News

Deep impacts

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California's budget is deep in the red. In a few weeks, our legislators will be responsible for making cost-cutting proposals to meet the realities of reduced state income caused by the housing crisis.

I appreciate the difficulty of making prudent choices in challenging times. However, current budget-balancing proposals will have serious impacts on the health of our people, and the potential to further erode the viability of our local system of care.

You should know:

The governor has proposed cuts that target dental coverage to adults living at and below the poverty level. It's a penny-wise, pound-foolish strategy because regular oral health care saves money by addressing routine problems before they become costly health crises. Capping the amount of services would make sense, but eliminating dental coverage demonstrates a critical misunderstanding of real people's real health needs.

Dental coverage cuts also threaten the long-term viability our county's community health centers. Because proposed cuts would require significant layoffs in their dental programs, the clinics' ability to provide dental services to any of their patients (adults or children) would be severely hampered.

The governor's proposal also threatens the Health Families program record by placing a cap on dental coverage and increasing monthly premium costs charged to working parents. Because the

proposal in no way affects how often children get cavities, it means that many more of our kids will be suffering the effects of untreated dental problems, impacts that are known to include a decline in school attendance and academic performance and their parents will be less able to afford timely care.

Finally, a proposal for a 10 percent reimbursement reduction for medical providers will significantly impact our local private medical providers, reduce the availability of specialty care services for our low-income populations and debilitate cost-effective, early-intervention programs like Child Health and Disability Prevention (CHDP) and Family P.A.C.T. (Planning, Access, Care, and Treatment).

You have an impact on your legislators. If you want to help protect our local system of care, send a letter to Assembly Members Patty Berg and Pat Wiggins, and to Gov. Schwarzenegger, voicing your opposition to the proposed health budget cuts.

Cathy Frey

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Alliance for Rural Community Health

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