

Idaho Press Tribune, Sunday, Feb. 13, 2011 – by Mike Butts (3 pages)

Medicaid provider says thousands of jobs at stake

TREASURE VALLEY — Medicaid cuts proposed by Gov. Butch Otter would lead to thousands of job losses and increased costs to the state for taking care of developmentally disabled and mentally ill Idaho residents, many providers and users of Medicaid funds say.

Otter proposed a \$25 million cut to Medicaid programs to balance the state's budget. That number would climb to \$84 million with the loss of federal matching funds and could increase as new, lower state revenue figures come to light.

One option for cutting Medicaid spending presented by Idaho Health and Welfare officials includes the elimination of adult developmental disability services and psycho-social rehabilitative (PSR) services for a savings of \$20 million. That, according to Medicaid providers and users, would cause serious harm to Idaho's economic and social makeup. The elimination of PSR alone would lead to the loss of 7,000 good-paying jobs across the state, All Seasons Mental Health general manager Matt Scuri said. And the total could be more if support staff jobs at mental health clinics were also lost.

All Seasons has clinics from Nampa to Mountain Home and employs about 150 people.

About one out of three of those jobs would be cut if the state eliminated PSR, Scuri said.

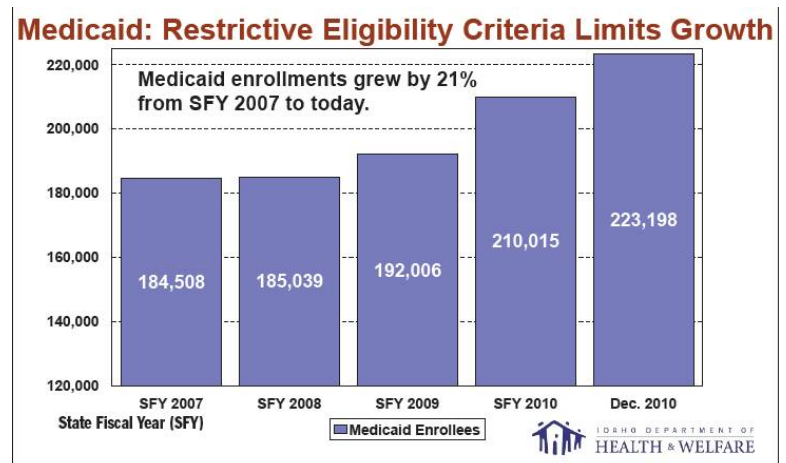
Scuri and others say Medicaid budget cuts will require other more expensive social services when Medicaid clients fall through the cracks and end up in jails or hospitals or on welfare rolls.

"There's a social cost here," Scuri said, "you're still going to pay." And, he said, the cuts would "send the economy downwards."

Idahoans who receive PSR services have mental health problems that rise to the level of disability, Scuri said, so their treatment is essential to their ability to function normally.

Community Partnerships of Idaho works with developmentally disabled children and adults. It has a Nampa office with about 84 clients and 50 employees. Thirty to 40 of those workers would lose their jobs with the elimination of developmental disability services, the clinic's developmental Executive Director TeRonda Robinson said.

The job losses would have a economic ripple effect in communities that would cause more hardship, Community Partnerships of Idaho Executive Director Katherine Hansen said.



“That’s particularly going to be huge in communities where there are a number of people working in this field,” Hansen said. “There’s going to be a lot of unintended consequences.”

Idaho’s Medicaid funding is made up of 30 percent state funds and 70 percent federal matching funds. State lawmakers are a long way from setting the Medicaid budget.

“We’re still waiting to get more direction from legislators so we can work with them to determine what the final budget will be,” Idaho Health and Welfare spokeswoman Emily Simnitt said.

Medicaid serves as lifeline to local man

NAMPA — Nampa resident Ricky Stephens owes his quality of life to Medicaid developmental disability services, his mother said.

Stephens, 24, attends a disability center called LIFE Inc. in Boise each weekday to learn life skills. He also works 10 hours a week at a McDonald’s restaurant near the Boise Towne Square mall. Without the Medicaid service and funding he gets, he would regress in his emotional and developmental progress, his mother Tonia Stephens, 49, said. And she said he would lose his job because he would not have the help of a job coach who attends work with him.

“When you change his life in a traumatic way like that, he reverts back, and that’s really sad if our state allows that to happen,” Tonia Stephens said. “Every year when there’s a budget crisis they try to balance it on the back of these kids’ programs.

If Ricky lost his job and services, Tonia Stephens said, she would have to quit her job as an accountant to stay home and take care of him.

Tonia Stephens also qualifies for certified family home funding that helps pay living expenses for her son. She said it would cost substantially more to institutionalize her son.

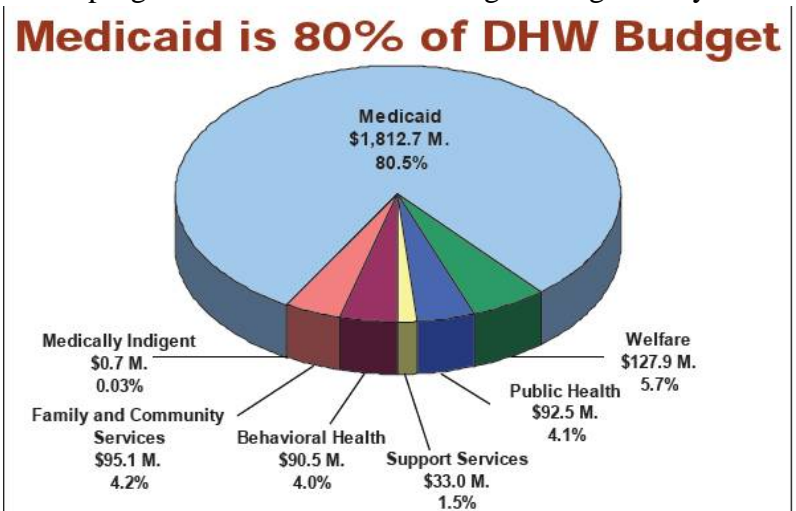
Medicaid Matters rallies across state

Supporters want to raise taxes for programs

TREASURE VALLEY — Supporters will rally in 16 cities across the state, including Nampa and Boise, at noon Saturday to advocate for the importance of Medicaid programs in Medicaid Matters gatherings. Many supporters want to raise taxes to keep Medicaid programs funded.

A petition to raise taxes for Medicaid has 7,000 signatures from across the state, Community Partnerships of Idaho Executive Director Katherine Hansen said. Hansen wants lawmakers to look at either sales, cigarette or beer and wine tax increases. But she said it will be weeks before lawmakers get to a point where they would consider those options.

“As the session rolls on, hopefully we can get at



a place where we don't totally dismantle the community system," Hansen said.

So far in the 2011 Legislative Session most lawmakers have been reluctant to consider tax increases.

Funding sources for Medicaid services provider payments

Democrats host Medicaid speaker

CANYON COUNTY — DJ Stephens of Medicaid Matters in Idaho will speak at a meeting of Democrats at 7 p.m. Tuesday at the Canyon County Courthouse in Caldwell. Stephens will describe what cutting another \$80 million to \$100 million from the Medicaid budget would do to the disabled and challenged that receive Medicaid services and support. He will also address repercussions for the Idaho economy as a whole. Stephens supports a temporary 1-cent increase in the sales tax to get Idaho's budget through the next two years.

Idaho Health and Welfare "blunt approach" option to cutting Medicaid funding

■ Eliminate two state optional adult programs:

Developmental disability center services – \$8.4 million in state and \$27.7 million in total funds

Psycho-social rehabilitative services – \$11.8 million in state and \$39.5 million in total funds

■ Reduce scope of state optional adult benefit:

Cover only urgent dental services (except for pregnant women) – \$3.7 million in state and \$12.4 million in total funds

Establish co-pays – \$1.3 million in state and \$4.3 million in total funds

Total cost reductions – \$25.2 million in state and \$84 million in total funds

■ In Health and Welfare's "tailored strategies" to budget cuts, a variety of cuts would be made to save the state \$20.7 million. Some of those cuts would be to urgent dental care for adults, chiropractic coverage, establishment of co-pays and limits on adult podiatry and vision services.