TOP STORIES

Counties Seek Relief for Funding Cuts to Supportive Services
Budget adjustments could cost $4.4 billion over 6 years

The California State Association of Counties (CSAC) is hoping to work out a compromise with state officials over a budget proposal that eliminates state funding to counties for In-Home Supportive Services (IHSS).

The budget proposes to phase out elements of the state’s Coordinated Care Initiative (CCI) that include an IHSS program that provides funding to counties. The budget will eliminate the IHSS Maintenance of Effort (MOE) agreement as part of its modification of the CCI plan, which provides managed care for 114,000 dual-eligible Medicare-Medicaid patients in the state. Phasing out the MOE “would add an estimated $625 million to county costs for IHSS in fiscal 2018 and an estimated $4.4 billion over the next six years,” according to the CSAC.

“This would be devastating to counties all over the state,” said CSAC President and Alameda County Supervisor Keith Carson. “We undoubtedly would have to make cuts to other vital social services to cover these costs.” The shift represents “the single largest change in the budget from last year and unfairly burdens counties with costs they cannot control nor afford,” according to a CSAC statement.

IHSS costs have increased sharply since the program began five years ago, driven by a hike in the state’s minimum wage, new paid-sick-leave provisions for IHSS employees, and federal overtime regulations, CSAC officials said.

“Counties will have to find a way to pay for these additional costs, because the program is much more expensive now than it was five years ago,” said Farrah McDaid Ting, a legislative representative for the CSAC. “It will probably mean that counties will have cut health and mental health programs to deal with the additional costs, or take money out of the general fund.”

The CSAC is hoping to work with state officials and legislators to develop a compromise plan that would provide counties with financial help for IHSS. “We’re hoping to come up with legislation that will create a cost-sharing program to help counties with the added expense,” said McDaid Ting.
Scripps Health and insurer Cigna Inc. have entered into an agreement to offer a Scripps HMO Health Plan to employers in San Diego County that have at least 100 employees. According to a joint press release from Cigna and Scripps, the HMO plan will be available starting April 1 and will offer value-based incentives that encourage preventive care. “Our joint approach to healthcare is different from a traditional one because it’s based on very close integration between Scripps Health and Cigna,” said Gene Rapisardi, president and general manager for Scripps’ Southern California and Nevada markets. The Scripps HMO Plan will provide access to care at Scripps acute care hospitals in San Diego County along with Scripps medical clinics, specialty services, and physicians from two medical groups.

St. Joseph Hoag Health has appointed new CEOs for Mission Hospital, St. Jude Hospital, and St. Joseph Hospital. Jeremy Zoch, PhD, has been appointed CEO of St. Joseph Hospital in Orange. Zoch will replace current President and CEO Steven C. Moreau when Moreau retires in late March. Zoch is currently the executive vice president and chief operating officer for St. Joseph Hospital and previously served as COO of Mercy Hospitals in Bakersfield. St. Joseph Hoag also appointed Tarek Salaway CEO of Mission Hospital in Mission Viejo and St. Jude Hospital in Laguna Beach. That appointment was effective

IHSS Funding Cuts cont.

The main component of the CCI program—Cal MediConnect—will remain in place. The budget proposal stated the program has demonstrated that it can generate cost-savings and proposed to “extend the Cal MediConnect program and continue mandatory enrollment of dual-eligible members.”

The $122.5 billion state budget unveiled by Gov. Jerry Brown on January 11 calls for few healthcare funding increases other than an additional $800 million for Medi-Cal to help fund Medicaid expansion, which has added an additional 3.7 million new members to Medi-Cal and boosted total state enrollment to 13.5 million.

Some healthcare advocates have raised concerns about how the budget proposes to spend funds from a new cigarette tax. Proposition 56, which levies a $2-per-pack tax on cigarettes and an equivalent tax on e-cigarettes, was approved by voters last November. It will go into effect on April 1 and could generate as much as $1.2 billion in revenue in fiscal 2018.

Brown’s budget proposal commits Proposition 56 revenue toward the General Fund and states that details on spending will be worked out with state legislators. The California Medical Association (CMA) said that cigarette tax revenue was intended for Medi-Cal and smoking prevention programs.

“We’re disappointed that Governor Brown’s budget ignores the will of voters who supported Proposition 56 by proposing to offset general fund obligations with tobacco tax revenues rather than investing in the overburdened Medi-Cal system to improve access to care,” said CMA President Ruth E. Haskins, MD.

—DOUG DESJARDINS

Gardens Regional Hospital is Shutting its Doors
Hospital closing after acquisition deal falls through

A Los Angeles hospital began shutting down last week after state officials were unable to finalize a deal with a potential buyer.

Gardens Regional Hospital and Medical Center in Hawaiian Gardens began shutting down on January 18 after its proposed sale to Riverside-based Strategic Global Management Inc. failed through over a provision that required the prospective buyers to provide $2.25 million per year for charity care over six years.
IN BRIEF

Continued from page 2

December 16, 2016. Salaway most recently served as chief operating officer for USC Keck Medical Center in Los Angeles and previously held executive positions at Stanford Health Care and Providence Health & Services.

■ St. Francis Medical Center has appointed Derek Drake, DNP, RN, as its new chief nursing officer. Drake most recently served as director of Emergency and Trauma Services at Renown Health in Reno, Nevada, where he led nursing operations at emergency departments for three hospitals. Prior to that, he served as nursing manager for the cardiac intensive care unit for Renown Regional Medical Center.

“Derek Drake is a perfect fit with St. Francis,” said Gerald Kozai, president and CEO of St. Francis Medical Center in Lynwood. “He brings a fresh perspective to our nursing and executive management teams and shares with us a passion for nursing excellence.”

■ A group seeking to recall a member of the board of directors for Tulare Regional Medical Center has turned in 1,375 signatures for its recall effort. According to a report in the Visalia Times-Delta, a group of local residents submitted the signatures in an effort to recall board member Parmod Kumar, MD, who has served on the board since 1994. The group needs 1,049 verified signatures of registered voters in the Tulare Regional Healthcare District to stage a recall election. Tulare County deputy elections supervisor Emily HIRE POWER: HEALTHFAX

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TOP STORIES

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Hospital to Close cont.

Strategic Global submitted a bid in August to purchase the assets of Gardens Regional Hospital, a 137-bed not-for profit acute care facility, for $19.5 million. However, Strategic Global was apparently unable to meet the charity care provisions required by the state Attorney General as a condition of the sale.

Lawyers representing Strategic Global filed an emergency motion in U.S. Bankruptcy Court in Los Angeles to close the hospital. The motion stated that “with its remaining cash on hand dwindling, and no other buyer willing to acquire Gardens’ assets as a going concern, the debtor has determined in its best business judgment that it must close the hospital.”

Gardens Regionals executives could not be reached for comment but a hospital representative said Gardens Regional closed its emergency department at 7:00 a.m. on January 18, was no longer accepting new patients, and planned to shut down completely after its current patient base was discharged. Officials from Strategic Global Management did not return calls seeking comment.

A January 17 letter from the Los Angeles County Emergency Medical Services Agency notified emergency medical personnel in the Hawaiian Gardens area that Gardens Regional Hospital and Medical Center “will be closing its emergency department at 7 a.m. on January 18,” and would no longer be a receiving hospital for emergency transport.

Gardens Regional filed for bankruptcy in June 2016 and entered an acquisition agreement with Strategic Global in August. In its bankruptcy filing, the safety net hospital, located just south of Los Angeles, cited a number of factors for its financial problems that included a dwindling patient base that was comprised mainly of patients enrolled in Medicaid and Medicare.

“Medicaid and Medicare reduced their payment rates in the range of 2.9% to 10% in or after 2010, which whittled down our reimbursement revenues,” the filing stated. Court documents also stated that Gardens Regional needed to generate $119,474 per day in revenue to cover its operating costs but was only generating $91,830 per day.

Adding to its problems were “unanticipated operational costs, a decline in bariatric and other surgeries, difficulties in implementing required changes to electronic health records, managing the length of stay for patients, and difficulties in collection and billing, among other things.” At the time of the filing, Gardens Regional reported more than $20 million in unsecured debt.

The last hospital in California to shut down was Colusa Regional Medical Center, a rural hospital that closed last April.—DOUG DESJARDINS
More Measles Cases Confirmed in Ventura, Los Angeles Counties
Outbreak now stands at 20 cases in Southern California

State health officials say the number of measles cases in Southern California has increased from 12 cases to 20 in an outbreak that began shortly before Christmas.

The Ventura County Department of Public Health confirmed the newest case in Southern California on January 11 and the first case in that county to date. Ventura County officials believe the case is linked to an outbreak that began in Los Angeles County on December 23 and has infected 18 county residents since then.

"We are making our best effort to contain this measles outbreak so that we can prevent any further cases in the county," said Robert Levin, MD, Ventura County Public Health Officer. Measles is a highly contagious disease, Levin said, and he urged anyone who has not been vaccinated for measles to get vaccinated.

The only other case of measles outside Los Angeles County was reported at Goleta Valley Cottage Hospital in Santa Barbara on December 27. Santa Barbara County health officials said the hospital was "quickly able to verify that all exposed healthcare workers had been vaccinated against the measles virus" and that no new cases have been reported since then.

The California Department of Public Health (CDPH) said seven new cases of measles have been reported in Los Angeles County since the first wave of 11 cases in late December.

"Since December 2016, a total of 20 measles cases have been reported to the CDPH that have been linked to the ongoing outbreak in Southern California," the CDPH said in a statement. "A total of 18 cases were from Los Angeles, one was from Santa Barbara, and one from Ventura."

Measles has an incubation period of up to three weeks, which means it can take several weeks for new cases to appear after a case is reported, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The CDC defines a measles outbreak as three or more cases that are part of the same train of transmission.

The last outbreak of measles in California started at Disneyland in Anaheim in December 2014 and eventually infected 131 state residents. An investigation conducted by the CDPH found that 57 of the people infected during that outbreak had never been vaccinated for measles and 25 patients did not receive a full round of measles vaccinations.—DOUG DESJARDINS

Oliveira said the county has 30 days to verify the signatures and the hospital board would have to hold a recall election within 88 days if enough signatures were gathered. The group leading the recall effort describes it as an attempt to hold Kumar and the Tulare Regional board responsible for "abandoning its fiduciary duty to its citizens."

Children's Hospital Los Angeles (CHLA) announced that a laptop computer that may have contained the personal information of approximately 3,600 former patients was stolen from a physician's car. The laptop was protected with a password, but it's not clear whether the healthcare data from the laptop was encrypted, according to a January 16 report in the Los Angeles Daily News. Children's Hospital is in the process of notifying parents of the children potentially affected by the theft.

"Following the notification regarding the burglary, an investigation took place to determine whether patient health information existed on the laptop," said CHLA spokesman Lorenzo Benet. "Based on the investigation, the laptop has not been used to access the Internet. From that information, we believe that all data may have been erased from the device without any patient data being accessed." CHLA said it is notifying parents about the potential breach "out of an abundance of caution."

Huntington Memorial Hospital in Pasadena is notifying patients who
underwent open-heart surgery that they may have been exposed to potentially dangerous bacteria. According to a January 13 report in the *Los Angeles Times*, patients receiving the warning underwent surgery using a device that regulates blood temperatures during procedures and has been linked to infections from *Mycobacterium chimaera*. Huntington hospital officials are notifying patients who had open-heart surgery dating back four years and said that, to date, no patients have reported any problems with surgery-related infections. Patients can develop *Mycobacterium chimaera* infections years after exposure, making it difficult to trace and detect, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

■ Kaweah Delta Medical Center in Visalia set up a tent outside its emergency department to handle a high volume of flu patients. According to a January 11 report in the *Fresno Bee*, the hospital erected the 570-square-foot tent after its 33-bed ED handled 289 patients in one day. "We had 45 patients at one point who were admitted but holding in the emergency department for hospital beds," said Edward Hirsch, MD, chief medical and quality office at Kaweah Delta. Nearby Clovis Community Medical Center had to take similar measures on January 10 when it turned its main lobby into a temporary waiting room to handle an overflow of ED patients. Influenza activity is now “widespread” in Northern California, according to the California Department of Public Health.

■ A new report from the Office of Statewide Health Planning and Development (OSHPD) found that 92% of hospital buildings in California are now compliant with state seismic safety standards. The report issued by OSHPD on January 12 found that “92% of hospital buildings do not have a significant risk of collapse” in the event of a major earthquake. The report estimates that approximately 225 of 3,037 hospital buildings in the state are still at significant risk of collapse and must be either replaced or retrofitted in order to remain open.

■ A study from the UCLA Center for Health Policy Research estimates that 4.9 million state residents could be impacted by a repeal of the Affordable Care Act (ACA). The study estimates that 3.7 million state residents have gained health coverage through Medicaid expansion and that 1.2 million have received federal subsidies averaging $309 per month to purchase health coverage on the Covered California state insurance exchange. The study also estimates that Medi-Cal enrollment in some counties increased by double digits during Medicaid expansion. The study estimates that 13.9% of residents in both Mendocino and Humboldt counties enrolled for coverage through Medicaid expansion, followed by 13.6% of residents in Trinity County and 12% in Fresno County.

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