

# The Daily Courier

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## State budget cuts affect mentally ill in Yavapai County

By [Linda Stein](#)

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Some mentally ill patients who lack health insurance will find their treatment cut or diminished as of July 1.

State cutbacks have county officials scrambling to try to fix the problem, Deputy County Attorney Jack Fields said.

He explained that the county pays about \$950,000 per year to screen people for mental illness so their cases can be presented to a judge, who then may order them to get treatment.

But some of those mentally ill people who aren't eligible for Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System (AHCCCS) - including 377 currently served by West Yavapai Guidance Clinic - will see cuts in their treatment program.

Fields said that treatment for the seriously mentally ill people who obtain services through Regional Behavioral Health Authorities will be "seriously curtailed" despite orders from the court that they obtain care. Those mentally ill patients don't have jobs or health insurance but also do not meet the eligibility requirements for AHCCCS, Arizona's version of Medicaid, he said.

While some expressed surprise that Proposition 100, the 1-cent sales tax increase voters approved on May 18, didn't fix this problem, the \$2.5 million program decreases are because of an earlier round of state budget cutting, said Laurie Norman, spokeswoman for West Yavapai Guidance Center. Services will continue for another 700 patients that AHCCCS covers.

While some treatment will continue, such as crisis intervention, medication and outpatient doctor and nurse visits, inpatient treatment will fall by the wayside. Other services such as transportation, residential services and case management also vanish because of the cuts. And the drugs permitted for those affected will be generic, rather than some of the newer, more effective medications, Fields said.

"This is creating a problem," Fields said. "The county pays for the screening and evaluation but at the end of the process, we're looking for court ordered treatment."

About 70 people in the Verde Valley also will lose services, he said.

"It's affecting us because if we move somebody through the court system, the whole point is to get them into treatment," Fields said. "If no one is going to pay for it, if there is no treatment available, because there's no funding the whole Title 36 (court) process becomes an exercise in futility. If we don't have a place for them to get treatment just a whole lot of time and effort is wasted. Now there's a whole group of people who need treatment and nowhere to send them. There's a feeling that the state's goal in doing this is to pass on the cost to the county."

David Hunt, counsel for the Board of Supervisors, said the county steps in if "a person is believed to be a danger to himself or others or is gravely disabled."

The person ordered to undergo screening may or may not have committed a crime, he said.

"The county is responsible for screening and gives \$950,000 a year to the Mingus Center for screening and evaluation," Hunt said. "The county is not responsible for the treatment."

The courts order about three or four people per month to undergo treatment for mental illness, he said. While AHCCCS money remains available, "other state funds are being cut off and providers have told us they won't pay for it. We are not legally required to pay for treatment so we are not stepping up. We're looking for other measures."

Meanwhile, Norman said those affected suffer from serious mental illnesses like schizophrenia or bipolar disorder.

"We're disappointed," Norman said. "We're concerned about our clients who are impacted but there is nothing we can do. One person being affected by this is too many."

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