

San Francisco Human Services Network
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Human Services Slashed: Where is the Outrage?

If you've been reading media coverage on the Mayor's proposed budget, you may have the impression that San Francisco has dodged a bullet in facing a \$338 million budget deficit. The public story is that our strong economy, some city layoffs, and a few inconveniences will pull us through.

But from the community-perspective, this is the worst budget we have ever faced. The bottom line is a total cut to over 150 community-based nonprofit organizations of close to \$20 million in Public Health, Human Services and other departments. These same service providers will contend with further devastation due to state and federal cuts, and no increase from the city to cover their rising expenses or any raises for their dedicated staff.

On July 1, San Franciscans will begin to feel the effects of the largest health and human service cut in our history. And nobody knows which programs will close, how many and what clients will lose their services, whether and how they will be transitioned to other programs (if any alternatives exist), how many nonprofit workers will be laid off, or what it will cost for those clients who end up in the emergency room, jails, other institutions, or on the streets.

If these deep cuts go through, however, the public will learn about the impacts the hard way.

Program closures and reductions: Cuts to nonprofits are 22% across-the-board in the Department of Public Health (DPH). The lack of any increase to pay for rising costs will bring the de facto cut even higher, to 25% or more. For some, the cut is even deeper: over 30% for substance abuse treatment providers, and elimination of city funding for complementary HIV/AIDS therapies such as acupuncture. Domestic violence providers will face cuts of 12% to 37%, with funding reduced to the level of 10 years ago.

We cannot sustain this level of cuts without significant program closures and reductions in substance abuse treatment, medical care, homeless services, mental health, case management, access to food, and more.

Impact on specialized services: Many nonprofits will eliminate services that are unduplicated anywhere else in the system, particularly those that are language- or culturally-specific, work with especially difficult client demographics, or assist at-risk seniors, children and youth.

Number of clients losing their services: DPH's list of community-program cuts estimates the loss of services to over 18,600 clients, and close to 1.8 million units of service. These are shocking numbers.

Impact on city services: The budget cuts will hamper nonprofits' ability to participate in the Mayor's homeless programs, Care Not Cash and Project Homeless Connect. Service reductions will also affect the success of the proposed Community Justice Court because the needed services simply will not be available.

A broader question is the ultimate cost when the sudden loss of services leaves thousands of vulnerable people with no place to turn. The alternatives are much more expensive: more homeless and chronic inebriates on the streets; more ambulance trips, emergency room visits, and institutionalization; more crime and incarceration.

San Francisco needs a budget that prioritizes human needs. The Board of Supervisors has the power to restore some of these cuts. Express your outrage. Many lives are depending on it.

Next week, the public will have two opportunities to express their views to the Board: a public hearing about health cuts on Tuesday, June 17 at 3pm, and public comment on the entire budget on Thursday, June 19 at 5pm.

Steve Fields and Sherilyn Adams are Co-Chairs of the San Francisco Human Services Network, an association of over 100 health and human service nonprofits.