

State makes cuts to Medicaid reimbursement on in-home care

IDAHO FALLS, Idaho (AP) — Disabilities activists in Idaho are upset about a recent state decision to cut Medicaid reimbursement rates for in-home care for the developmentally disabled.

The state Department of Health and Welfare announced the change Friday in an information release, and its timing just before the holidays drew criticism, reported the Post Register (<http://bit.ly/1Yxhuz4>).

The department decreased the level of reimbursement to what providers received in 2006. Providers who offer in-home care at the "intense" level will see about a 46 percent cut in the reimbursement they receive each day, and rates were cut by 37 percent at the lowest level of support.

Advocates say most in-home care providers won't be able to survive the rate cuts, possibly forcing the developmentally disabled into state institutions and prisons.

"Some people aren't going to be able to get services at all, so they're going to wind up back in institutions where they will cost the state even more money," said James Piotrowski, an attorney who represented the state's providers in a U.S. Supreme Court case earlier this year.

The Supreme Court ruled in a 5-4 decision in March that the providers don't have the right to sue the state over its Medicaid reimbursement formula.

The department says it won't allow loss of access to services.

"We monitor these rates continuously, especially at the beginning, especially to make sure that all participants have access to the services they need and that we have quality services," said spokesman Tom Shanahan. "If we have issues with either access or quality, we will have to review those rates."

Idaho Falls-based H.A.S. Inc. director Shaw Johansson said his business won't even be able to make payroll under the new rates and would be forced to take out a loan each year to cover costs.

"They're arbitrary cuts," he said. "It's going to shut down half the companies (who provide in-home services), if not more. And it's going to put the community at risk."

Most H.A.S. caregivers who work directly with clients earn only \$8.50 per hour, a rate Johansson said is relatively high for the industry.

Information from: Post Register, <http://www.postregister.com>

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