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Mental-health cuts scaring agencies

Board prepares to slash \$10.8 million

Tuesday, August 11, 2009 3:12 AM

BY MISTI CRANE

THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

Unprecedented and painful cuts are on the way for agencies that provide care to mentally ill Franklin County residents.

A proposal to cut a total of \$10.8 million from the rest of this year's budget and the 2010 budget was discussed yesterday in committee and goes before the Alcohol, Drug and Mental Health Board of Franklin County later this month.

Leaders of the agencies that depend on ADAMH say they know that the board has no choice in light of a state budget that decimated mental-health funding.

After two rounds of smaller cuts made since last fall, providers say there's no way to avoid eroding their ability to help the severely mentally ill and the subsequent strain on an already-swamped emergency-care system.

"It's a doomsday scenario," said Abbie Basile, executive director of Franklin County's National Alliance on Mental Illness, which receives funding from ADAMH.

"We're going to start to hear some very upsetting stories," she said.

Access to mental-health care already isn't where it should be, and this will only make matters worse, said Basile and others.

The proposed cuts represent the amount of money needed to help about 3,600 people with severe mental illness. Both ADAMH officials and providers are hopeful that they can make some adjustments that

Cutting continues
The Alcohol, Drug and Mental Health Board of Franklin County made these cuts in response to fewer state dollars:

	ADMINISTRATIVE BUDGET	%
October 2008	\$1 million	\$1
March 2009	\$88,000	\$1
August 2009	—	\$3
Contract year 2010	\$440,000	\$7

*Money that goes to agencies that provide services to them within Franklin County.
**Proposed. Source: ADAMH.

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will lessen the impact.

For example, group counseling sessions in place of one-on-one sessions can save money without completely cutting off services.

The proposal calls for \$3 million in cuts from this year's \$49.6 million budget, effective Sept. 1. This year's plan hurts almost everyone equally, with providers losing about 6 percent of the money they expected from ADAMH.

The plan to cut \$7.8 million from the 2010 budget will mean different things for different agencies and would amount to an overall reduction of 12.7 percent.

It calls for some initial targeted cuts and then a divvying up of dollars that will factor in the agency's geographic location, the population served and a measure of the agency's performance, said Jonathan Wylly, the board's chief financial officer.

The 2010 plan also calls for a 7 percent reduction in the administrative budget. No layoffs are planned, but positions have been lost through attrition, said David Royer, executive director.

Steve Votaw, chief executive officer of Directions for Youth and Families, and Kathryn Mihelich-Helms, executive director of the Dublin Counseling Center, shook their heads yesterday when asked to quantify the damage of further cuts to safety-net agencies.

Votaw said the providers have been meeting and plan to meet again Friday to figure out how to preserve access to care and plan for the fallout of further cuts.

"These are unprecedented times, they really are," Mihelich-Helms said.

"We're all just reeling."

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