



PHOTO BY WYNDE DYER/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Mohammad Bader of Multnomah County Aging and Disability talks with case manager Cheryl Sanders about how to identify clients who are most at risk for homelessness and suicide as a result of next month's cuts to the state's General Assistance and Medically Needy programs.

General Assistance Funds Dry Up

continued from Front

state's termination of the Oregon Supplemental Income Program Medical - Medically Needy. This program, which provides free medicine for low-income medically needy individuals, will also disappear on Feb. 1.

Mohammad Bader, north and northeast Portland Area Manager for Multnomah County Aging and Disability Services, said 628 of the 9,721 clients served by his two offices on Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard and Albina Avenue will be affected when the Medically Needy program ends.

"These are people with multiple and complicated illnesses with no access to pay for treatment," Bader said. "Our concern is that they will die."

Lauren Gill, one of Bader's case managers at the Albina ADS office, said she has two clients who are on a list for organ transplants. Before receiving new organs, transplant patients must show proof that they will be able to afford post-operative medication. Without the Medically Needy program, her clients will be unable to get their transplants. Others will not be able to afford more than \$1,000 a month for HIV and AIDS treatment.

"I have some clients who are paranoid schizophrenics," Gill said. "With no counseling and no meds, they would run out into traffic and kill themselves."

Bader said some medically needy people should try to get medication samples from pharmaceutical companies or by logging on to

www.needyeds.com.

He and his caseworkers are doing their best to pool together resources to offer clients the best support network in this time of crisis. They have modified their phone system in anticipation of a high caller volume and are working to develop a human resources directory for clients. Caseworkers are trying to identify those clients who will be most at risk for housing displacement to get them set up with emergency housing programs

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— Mohammad Bader, north and northeast Portland Area Manager for Multnomah County Aging and Disability Services

or in shelters. So far, Bader's staff has identified 96 people who are at high risk for homelessness.

"We're trying to establish protocols and figure out what our triage resources are," Bader said. "It's horrible because these are people's lives we're dealing with. These cuts are devastating."

Not only does Bader have his clients to worry about, but also his staff. His offices will lose 11 caseworkers by Feb. 1 and twice as many during the next round of cuts. Bader said some members of his staff have requested for him to bring a therapist to work to help them deal with the upcoming layoffs.

Case manager Cheryl Sanders, who has been with the Albina office of ADS for two years, said that

she and her coworkers know they will lose their jobs, but their real concern is for the clients they help.

"We love to help these people—that's why we work here," Sanders said. "For our clients, budget cuts make the difference between having a roof over their head and being homeless. We know we'll lose our jobs, but at least we have our health."

Jim Edge, acting assistant administrator for the state Office of Medical Assistance Programs, said even if Measure 28 passes on Jan. 28, General Assistance would not be restored. However, the measure may enable legislators to temporarily restore some of the Medically Needy program.

"The measure will restore funds for the next biennium, but not for the next 24 months," he said. "Things are definitely going to get more complicated."

The complications for Lana Centeno are only about to begin. Without her General Assistance check each month, Centeno will be faced with eviction. Unlike many of Oregon's disabled, she has a family support network in California who will allow her to live with them.

Centeno will have to sell all her belongings and interrupt her medical treatment to return to the state she left eight years ago. She ran away to Oregon to escape the drug lifestyle that left her with Hepatitis C. She sobered up, stayed clean and left everything behind her in San Jose. Now she will go back.

"It's really just one day at a time from here on out," Centeno said.

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