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Substance abuse treatment agencies brace for cuts

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DAYTONA BEACH -- For 12 years, Gina Oslizlo has battled alcohol and drug addiction, including recent charges of driving under the influence and drug charges.



The 43-year-old from Ormond Beach was in a treatment program five years ago, but said she was not ready to "accept my addiction." Now at a Serenity House treatment program for two months, she said, this is her "last chance" to turn her life around.

She's one of 159 people in residential substance abuse treatment in Serenity House's programs. Another 80 are waiting to get into the agency's residential treatment, which could take a month or more.

Oslizlo

Officials at Serenity House and Stewart-Marchman-Act Behavioral Healthcare, the main local providers, are worried about the programs with proposed cuts that could happen this legislative session because of an anticipated \$3 billion state deficit.

Committees already are meeting for the session that starts March 2. The Senate has asked state departments to submit proposals for 15 percent cuts, which will be made worse because matching federal dollars would also be lost.

George Sheldon, secretary for the state Department of Children & Families, who had to submit the proposed cuts, said he's hoping more federal dollars will be coming into the state, if approved by Congress, to help ease the impact.

"We could not get 15 percent reductions without devastating cuts in human services," Sheldon said.

In his proposed cuts, he spared child welfare and substance abuse and mental health programs for children. But he said cutting adult treatment services will only increase child abuse because drug and mental health issues are the underlying cause.

"I do not think that is the route Florida wants to go or should go," he said.

Sen. Evelyn Lynn, R-Ormond Beach, said the final projections on state funding are not available, "but it's not looking good."

"We are looking at making sure we fund the required and not the desired," she said.

She thinks substance abuse and mental health treatment should be in the required funding category, "but I foresee everybody getting reductions."

For Serenity House and Stewart-Marchman-Act, officials also are worried about \$1.2 million in community projects getting approved again this year. The \$823,100 for Serenity House pays for 37 residential substance abuse and mental health treatment beds, including those for people who are homeless and veterans.

The \$386,000 for Stewart-Marchman-Act pays for a detox unit in Flagler County, which had 484 admissions last year, and a Daytona Beach treatment program for pregnant mothers and mothers with young children, which served 53 women with their 89 children.

With the threat of losing those funds on top of other proposed cuts, Chet Bell, CEO of Stewart-Marchman-Act, is concerned about areas being targeted where "Florida is already so far behind." Studies show the state ranks 49th in the nation in per capita spending for mental health services and 34th for substance abuse services.

Randy Croy, Serenity House executive director, said cuts to substance abuse and mental health will cause more people to end up in jail and in hospitals because they are not getting treatment.

He'd like the Legislature to look at other revenue sources, including redirecting some of the tax on alcoholic beverages into treatment dollars or another bill by Lynn that would generate revenue from sales taxes on products purchased over the Internet that she said aren't being collected.

Croy and Mark Fontaine, executive director of the Florida Alcohol and Drug Abuse Association, point to a statewide study last year by a South Florida treatment provider that shows alcohol and drug use costs the state about \$43.7 billion a year from people committing crimes, causing traffic accidents and ending up in the hospital.

"What we are trying to do is help the Legislature understand that a cut to substance abuse cascades quickly to additional costs," Fontaine said.

Oslizlo, who has a teenage child, is grateful to have another chance at treatment instead of going to jail. This time, she said, she's choosing to use the tools she's being given.

"They work on your inner being. I'm learning higher self-esteem and how to set boundaries," she said. "They teach you to forgive yourself, which is a really big thing. I'm an alcoholic. I'm probably always going to have cravings, but what they teach you here is to stop and think. If I take that drink, what will happen -- play that tape all the way to the consequences."

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## Costs of drug, alcohol abuse

Local officials worry about the state Legislature cutting substance abuse treatment programs this year and point to a study stressing the need for more treatment dollars. The study states alcohol and drug abuse costs Florida \$43.7 billion per year.

### Each day in Florida:

- Three people die due to an alcohol-related traffic accident and nine people are injured.
- Eight people are sent to a hospital for alcohol abuse.
- 46 people are hospitalized because of drug abuse.

### Each year in Florida:

- Alcohol abuse causes more than 10,700 deaths.
- Alcohol abuse causes crimes that victimize more than 63,000 people.
- Drug abuse kills 4,468 Floridians.

Source: The Annual Economic Impact of Alcohol and Drug Use in Florida (2009) by Miami Behavioral Health Center and Spectrum Programs

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