

Critics: Children will bear brunt of state budget cuts

By [John Marelius](#), Union-Tribune Staff Writer

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SAN DIEGO – Proposed state budget cuts are so big, the numbers can become numbing and lose context.

This may put things into perspective:

“More children than can fit into Qualcomm Stadium are about to lose their health coverage,” said Gloria Cooper of Antioch Church of God and Christ said outside the Family Health Centers of San Diego, North Park Pediatric Clinic.

That's in San Diego County alone.

A group of local doctors, religious leaders, children's health advocates and parents on Thursday held a news conference objecting to the proposed elimination of the state Healthy Families program and deep cuts in Medi-Cal.

They said if Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's proposed cuts are approved by the Legislature, health services would be eliminated for 76,103 children in San Diego County.

Statewide, about 1 million children would lose coverage statewide, according to estimates.

A Schwarzenegger spokesman said a state budget deficit that has grown to \$24 billion leaves the governor and Legislature with few alternatives.

“The governor understands how difficult these cuts are going to be, but our revenues have dropped by 27 percent and we can only spend the money we have,” said press secretary Aaron McLear.

Thursday's event at a North Park pediatric clinic was sponsored by the San Diego Organizing Project, a faith-based network representing 41,000 people, as part of a statewide protest of health-related budget cuts.

“We realize that our state legislators have very difficult decisions to make,” said Wilbert Miller, pastor of First Lutheran Church of San Diego. “What we don't understand is why our children should bear the brunt of such cuts.”

Miller added that cutting Healthy Families would cost the state financially as well because for every \$1 the state puts in, the federal government puts in \$2.

Other speakers warned that people dropped from Healthy Families or Medi-Cal would become a burden on the taxpayers because they will have to resort to expensive emergency room treatment.

“One way or the other you will pay for it,” Cooper said, “either through Healthy Families or the emergency room.”

Pediatrician Mark Sawyer said the proposed cuts in health care could lead to public health problems because children would not have access to immunizations.

“We will have thousands of children who are not immunized and we will have more outbreaks of disease,” Sawyer said.

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