



California Collaborative for Long Term Services and Supports

Why We Had to Act in the Recent Health Care Tax Reform Debate

Over the next three years, the MCO tax will bring \$8 billion in federal support to California, providing stability and better access to the Medi-Cal program. On February 29 both houses of the state Legislature broke through over a year of deadlock to approve with strong bipartisan support three measures to redesign the Managed Care Organization tax to be complaint with federal law and thus secure \$1.1 billion dollars in funding to the Medi-Cal program that was at risk in the current budget year. One of the bills also passed was a major immediate funding package for services to support more than 300,000 Californians with developmental disabilities. The broader picture about what happened and why it is so important needs to be told.

The immediate issue we addressed began with policy made fifty years ago when California passed the Lanterman Act which established a bold and clear legal responsibility for the state to support the needs of those with developmental disabilities in the community as a better life than that inside state institutions. Families believed better options could be developed at less expense than inside state hospitals. They were and are still right today.

Since the deep cuts made during the 2008 recession remained in the Lanterman service system, people served were losing their freedoms to live like others in the community. State lawmakers needed to understand that people's lives were at risk from constant turnovers and programs closures. So advocates showed up early and often in offices, at every hearing held. They marched, and the self advocates conducted their own activities to express themselves--one powerful reminder was a rock band at the Capitol who played their own song: "We're Running in the Human Race."

They made their point. No one wants to be in an institution. There are others in our communities—those with serious physical and mental challenges, people confronted with similar issues as part of aging—who need many of the same pathways in their lives as those with developmental disabilities are achieving. New federal government policies regarding federal Medicaid spending by states make more real those legal standards for community living and compel states to act to support those who were once institutionalized as a matter of public policy through ignorance and neglect.

Any of us could find ourselves depending on others for our daily lives. Any of us can be or are on the receiving end of the decisions made by state lawmakers. The people who elect us know we must understand the impact our decisions have of those people whose lives literally depend on us.

The partnerships and collaborations developed to make this new funding package happen this week by the Governor and the Legislature will happen again hopefully as the public's understanding grows about how people live in this state often with serious long term support needs. It is our job to act as well as listen.