

Health care: Medicaid, drug treatment hard hit by budget problems

Published: Friday, Dec. 5, 2008 12:41 a.m. MST :: Desert News

More than \$100 million will be cut from the departments that serve the most needy of Utahns.

Among those cuts are \$83.6 million to the Department of Health's budget, \$79 million of which is from reductions in medical services provided to the state's poor through the joint state/federal Medicaid insurance plan. There is also \$17 million being cut from the Department of Human Services, \$12 million of which comes from substance abuse and mental health programs.

Cutbacks are virtually across the board in both departments, however, from the executive director's office to disease monitoring and lab services and local community health centers. Those are on top of cuts made during the special session earlier this year, which included a cap on the disabled waiting list that had been previously lifted.

"The cuts couldn't come at a worse time," because of "skyrocketing" Medicaid enrollment, said Lincoln Nehring with the Utah Health Policy Project.

Human Services executive director Lisa-Michelle Church said she will look for ways to cut costs that do not cut existing, acute services.

— James Thalman