

OF WELFARE

# Medi-Cal changes criticized

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New limits on Medi-Cal services for infants and illegal aliens who are pregnant "is bad public policy," the head of a Watsonville clinic said this morning.

The new policies "will cost more in the long run and even in the short run", with additional treatment needed for sick infants, said Barbara Garcia, executive director of Salud Para La Gente, a clinic which mainly serves the poor.

The new policies, part of budget cuts at the state level, will take away Medi-Cal eligibility for illegal aliens' children, who were not born in the United States and who are under a year old, said Gail Groves of Santa Cruz County's Human Resources Agency.

The new rules haven't been published yet, Groves said, and it is unclear whether pregnant women in the U.S. illegally will be eligible for pre-natal care. Aliens will be eligible for Medi-Cal at the time of delivery, Groves said.

Other illegal aliens already had limited access to Medi-Cal services, Groves said, and those rules will not change. A baby born in the U.S. is a citizen and eligible for Medi-Cal, even if his parents are illegal aliens.

Garcia estimated at least half of the 400 to 500 women who receive pre-natal care at Salud are not in the country legally. Salud will continue to provide the service, Garcia said, but will only get reimbursement for patients in the U.S. legally.

"We'll work it out" with those no longer eligible for Medi-Cal, Garcia said. "We'll have a sliding scale."

Still, she said, the added cost is putting a burden on Salud and other health-care providers. With funding limited, she said, "we're trying to put our dollars into preventive care" as much as possible.

The new rules will not change the eligibility of aliens for emergency medical care.