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Supervisors hurry to meet deadline

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Santa Cruz County supervisors are under the gun to make changes in the county's health programs by tonight or put off the changes for a month.

As a result, supervisors indicated they might conclude their budget hearings today and make decisions on how to make up a \$5.6 million deficit by tonight.

The board members had

planned to wait until Monday to vote on budget cuts and new taxes, but changed their minds yesterday after County Health Services Agency Director Elinor Hall told them that they faced a hitherto unknown deadline.

State law requires supervisors to amend their health agency budgets — if they plan to amend them — within 60 days of the approval of the state budget or wait another 30 days and then hold a public hearing on

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the medical service cutbacks. The deadline for approving any medical-service cutbacks without waiting another month is tomorrow, county officials said.

State budget cutbacks are threatening many Santa Cruz County programs, but none more severely than those affecting health care for the county's near-poor.

The 1990-91 state budget cuts Santa Cruz County's allocation for the medically indigent adult program by \$1,586,009 this year, a 46 percent reduction when compared to last year's appropriation.

The reductions, said Hall, "have led to a virtual (state) abdication of responsibility for maintaining county programs...."

The county's health-care program for the indigent, called Medi-Cruz, provides a minimal level of health care, including hospitalization, for those who do not have private health insurance and yet are not poor enough to qualify for the state- and federal-financed Medi-Cal program.

Last spring, county officials approved plans to expand the eligibility for the Medi-Cruz pro-

gram as well as offering some services that hadn't been available to the county's adult poor.

Now, Hall is suggesting that a retrenchment to 1988 service levels is the only possibility.

Under the proposals presented to the supervisors yesterday, no one, for example, would be eligible for Medi-Cruz if their family income was more than 200 percent of federal poverty levels. For a single person, that means he or she cannot earn more than \$12,564 a year and still qualify for Medi-Cruz.

People with \$5,000 more in assets than allowed by the Medi-Cal program will be ineligible for Medi-Cruz until they use those assets to pay their medical or hospital bills. Medi-Cal now allows a single person to have \$2,000 in property; \$3,000 for a couple.

Most specialty-care services, such as emergency-room and pregnancy-related benefits, will be discontinued for illegal immigrants and those seeking legalization.

The county will also tighten up its interpretation of "medical necessity," reducing the type of dental services provided and the number of physical-therapy visits.

It will also eliminate the methadone treatment program and voluntary sterilization (tubal ligation) programs.