

Officials assure advocates that push to privatize Medicaid services will move slowly, be transparent

By Yesenia Amaro Las Vegas Review-Journal

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(Thinstock) [image](#)

Nevada officials on Wednesday assured advocates in Clark County that any process to privatize Medicaid services for the elderly, blind and disabled will move slowly and will be transparent.

Advocates with Nevadans for the Common Good, a coalition of Las Vegas Valley institutions advocating for several issues including protection for vulnerable senior citizens, and members of AARP, a lobbying group for retirees, met privately with state officials. Attendees at the closed-door meeting included Richard Whitley, director of the state's Health and Human Services Department.

Barbara Paulsen, leader with Nevadans for the Common Good, said the meeting was positive and that advocates were pleased with what they learned. She said the coalition's push for transparency and the Las Vegas Review-Journal's reporting to get the information on the potential switch out to the public may have had an "impact on the process."

"Our concern was that the decision was already made and it was just all going to go very quickly without getting any input (from the public)," she said Wednesday. "That doesn't seem to be the case."

Legislation that would enable the state to consider providing services to the elderly, blind and disabled through a managed care model [raised concerns from the beginning](#). It was introduced in a bill during last year's legislative session and the public and those directly affected by the potential switch from state to private management of the services knew little about it. The original legislation died, but the concept survived after quietly being grafted onto a different bill right before the Legislature adjourned.

A couple of listening sessions to provide comment on the issue are scheduled in Clark County in the coming weeks, with one at 5 p.m. Jan. 20 at the Clark County Library, 1401 E. Flamingo Road. The first public session earlier this month in Washoe County drew 178 attendees.

State officials want to hear from as many stakeholders and gather as much information as they can about the potential switch, Paulsen said.

The state has also developed a website people can visit to get the latest updates on the process, said Chrystal Main, spokeswoman with the state's Health and Human Services Department.

"It's a very complex process and we have a lot of work to do," she said Wednesday. "I think there's so many concerns related to access to services, but this isn't going to happen quickly, this is going to be an extremely slow process to gather information."

After gathering information, state officials will develop a report that will be sent to the governor and the Legislature, she said. The governor would ultimately have to make a recommendation, which the state's Interim Finance Committee would have to approve, according to the legislation.

As of last fall, nearly 4,560 people from the three vulnerable populations were receiving services through the state's Medicaid waiver program to help them live independently.

But another 1,415 people were on a waiting list to receive the same services, and it was estimated that it would cost about \$40.3 million to eliminate the backlog. People who receive services through the waivers are just a portion of the state's total aged, blind and disabled Medicaid population.

Paulsen said state officials told advocates that the state's Health and Human Services Department was not driving the process to privatize Medicaid services for those vulnerable populations.

It's unclear who's driving the process now, she said. But Nevada Assembly Majority Leader Paul Anderson, R-Las Vegas, sponsored the original legislation.

For information on upcoming session and to get the latest updates on the process, visit:
<http://dhcfp.nv.gov/Pgms/LTSS/MCE/MCEHome/>

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