

Planned Parenthood to close three Bay Area clinics



(Patrick Tehan/Bay Area

News Group)

Anti-abortion protestors stand in front of a San Jose Planned Parenthood Health Center in February. The health agency has announced it will close three Bay Area clinics by the end of June. (Patrick Tehan/Bay Area News Group)

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RICHMOND — Planned Parenthood officials will close three Bay Area clinics by the end of June, and it could get worse.

Facilities in Richmond, Pittsburg and Vacaville will close June 30 as health reimbursements for the state's poor continue to shrink, according to Miriam Gerace, spokeswoman for Planned Parenthood of Northern California. And with Congress in May passing the American Health Care Act — a repeal plan for the Affordable Care Act — the women's health organization could lose even more funding. That plan would cut all federal funding for an entire year to Planned Parenthood.

“Medical reimbursement rates have not kept up with the times,” Gerace said. “That has an impact on us right here and right now in California.”

In California, the Medi-Cal reimbursement rate for health care is 81 percent of the national average, according to the Kaiser Family Foundation, the fourth lowest in the country. State legislators cut that rate in 2011 and now Planned Parenthood is asking them to pull out \$50 million from Prop. 56, a tobacco tax measure passed in November, and earmark the funds for the organization.

“We can only keep taking hits for so long,” Gerace said. “Costs have climbed, but reimbursements haven’t.”

Almost nine out of 10 Planned Parenthood patients are on Medi-Cal, the state’s insurance program for the poor.

The Northern California arm of Planned Parenthood currently operates 20 health care clinics — three of which will be closed — and three satellite facilities. It serves 100,000 patients each year for health care and another 55,000 for education and community services, Gerace said. Statewide, the women’s health organization serves about 850,000 people, she said.

Low reimbursement rates helped lead to the closure of Doctor’s Medical Center in San Pablo, said Contra Costa Supervisor John Gioia who represents Richmond where one clinic will close.

“That low reimbursement rate means a lot of stress on public and private providers,” he said. “These clinics play an important role in providing health services in our community.”

Planned Parenthood has been under attack by conservatives who do not want the federal government to finance health groups that provide abortions. Gerace said 98 percent of her organization’s services include birth control, cancer screening, prenatal care, infertility treatments, sexually transmitted disease treatment and testing and pregnancy tests. Only 2 percent of funds go toward abortions, and only state, not federal dollars, she added.

“All of these community clinics are working under a cloud of uncertainty, not knowing if the Affordable Care Act will be repealed and there will be a potential decrease of funding down the road,” Gioia said.

Gerace stressed that while three facilities will close, patients will still be able to receive treatment at nearby facilities. Central Richmond patients can go to the second Richmond facility or one in El Cerrito. Vacaville patients will be able to go to Fairfield and Pittsburg patients can travel to Antioch or Concord.

“We’re concerned,” Gerace said, “but we’re also resolute.”