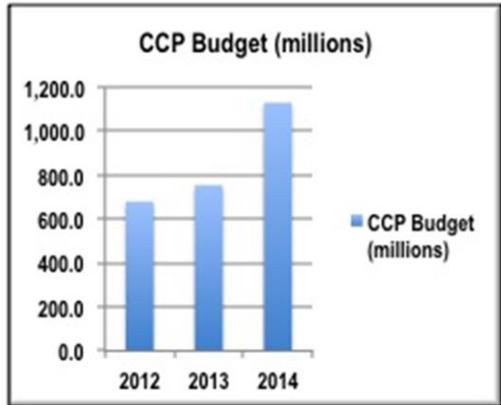


## Illinois home care providers fear shutdown of agencies without supplemental funds

by [Katie Peralta](#)  
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Katie Peralta/Medill

The FY 2014 budget proposes \$1.13 billion for the community care program. Part of the sharp increase over FY 2013 would go to cover unpaid bills from this year.

Illinois home care providers, out of cash, fear an imminent curtailing of services for about 80,000 seniors if the state’s Community Care Program does not soon receive a requested supplemental appropriation of \$173 million to last through June, the end of the fiscal year.

The Association of Community Care Program Homecare Providers said 37 percent of its approximately 70 member agencies reported that one more month added to their current pay lag could “result in going over their ‘fiscal cliff.’”

The Department of Aging program ran out of money March 15, effectively disabling it from approving payment for services provided to seniors and thus causing a backlog that threatens organizations dependent on state funds.

“The prognosis for home care providers becomes more precarious the longer they are subjected to the current moratorium on state reimbursements,” said Mike Truppa, communications director of Service Employees International Union Healthcare Illinois-Indiana, which represents home-

care employes and is lobbying for the supplemental appropriation.

Truppa said the funding gap could have “catastrophic effects on Illinois homecare system,” affecting both senior care and the jobs of thousands of care providers.

The state is already anywhere between 90 and 100 days late in paying providers, who in turn often cannot pay their employees in time, said Ron Ford, president and CEO of Help at Home Inc., one of the largest providers of senior home care services.

Ford said he has seen three non-profits that have been in business for decades discontinue senior homecare services because of the funding problems in the past month: Bethel New Life in Chicago, Tri-County Opportunities Council in Rock Falls and Spoon River Home Health Services in Peoria.

A closure of such providers, he said, may force seniors into nursing homes, a more costly and often less desirable alternative to homecare.

“You have to look at quality of life of being at home still and not being in nursing home,” Ford said.

Putting seniors into nursing homes could cost taxpayers thousands more than homecare, which, Ford said, costs about \$17 per patient per hour, averaging less than \$10,000 per person annually since care is not 24-hour. The federal government then subsidizes another half of that since CCP clients are Medicaid recipients.

By comparison, nursing home care can cost up to \$8,000 per month, or \$96,000 per year. “If clients of ours end up in nursing homes, it will cost the state a lot more money,” said Diane Drew, president of the Illinois Association of Community Care Program Homecare Providers. “If they’re in their homes, they’re out being good consumers.

In addition to the move to nursing homes, closure of CCP-funded providers is also prompting seniors to seek care from privately owned agencies.

Sheila McMackin, owner of Wellspring Personal Care, said that her agency has experienced an uptick recently in families seeking care.

“People are avoiding sending their loved ones to a nursing home,” she said.

McMackin said relying on state funding is risky.

“As a provider, I’d be hard-pressed to make a contract with the state,” she said. “It can be very dicey.”

Ford said that with the aging of Baby Boomers, the number of people receiving care from CCP could jump to 95,000 next year.

The CCP funding problem is a direct reflection of the state's economic struggle and its growing backlog of bills.

"For the last several years, Illinois has been in a budget crisis without money to pay its bills," Truppa said. "The magnitude of this has been profound by historical standards."

Rep. Sara Feigenholtz of Chicago will sponsor the supplemental appropriation as an amendment to a bill already in progress in the Illinois House. IACCPHP leaders say they think the funding should be approved quickly because lawmakers understand its importance.

Drew said her organization plans to lobby in Springfield for support of the appropriation and for sufficient funding for next fiscal year as well.

"They understand that the program saves the state a lot of money," she said. "What they need to do is look to the future."