app.

HEALTH

Already threatened by Medicaid cuts, Monmouth ARC could lose NJ grant to help disabled

Four-minute read



Michael L. Diamond
Asbury Park Press

April 22, 2025, 5:04 a.m. ET

Key Points AI-assisted summary

- The Arc of Monmouth may lose $295,000 in state funding, impacting behavioral health services for 500 people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.
- The potential cuts come as the organization faces financial strain, having recently closed a primary care clinic and with potential Medicaid cuts looming.
- While the Murphy administration has increased funding for IDD services, federal Medicaid cuts could offset these gains.

The Arc of Monmouth is at risk of losing a $295,000 state grant that would force the nonprofit group to cut back on behavioral health services for some 500 people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, its executive director said.

Robert Angel said Gov. Phil Murphy's proposed budget that would go into effect in July leaves out funding that The Arc of Monmouth has received for more than a decade. He is appealing to lawmakers to restore the funds in the final budget, noting that it helps pay for psychiatric care that is hard to find elsewhere.

"Because there aren't the services available, these people will fall by the wayside," Angel said.

The Arc of Monmouth, based in Red Bank, provides education, housing and health services for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). The organization has used the grant to help pay for a behavioral health program that includes a psychiatrist, a psychiatric nurse practitioner and two counselors.

Working with disabilities: Students with autism learn at Bell Works about how to nail the job interview and find work

The potential loss of funding comes at a precarious time. The organization recently shuttered a primary care clinic in Toms River because of budget constraints. And Congress is considering a federal budget bill that would cut $880 billion over 10 years from Medicaid, a major funding source for the Monmouth Arc.

Among those waiting to see how the state and federal budget debates play out is Sal Rufolo, 52, of Tinton Falls, whose brother, Michael, 39, was diagnosed with autism and schizoaffective disorder.

Rufolo and his family took Michael in after their father died, but he soon found his brother needed more care than he could provide. Rufolo moved Michael to a nearby group home operated by Monmouth Arc, where he receives comprehensive care, including visits to a mental health counselor twice a week.

Rufolo said he has sat in on sessions and has watched counselors team up with nurse practitioners to help Michael sort out his thought process, become more self-aware and pick up techniques that can keep him grounded.

"It's amazing," Rufolo said. "I like to say psychiatric disorders are extremely difficult to live with, for the individual and their family. People see physical disabilities with their eyes. If you see somebody, for instance, in a wheelchair, you know they have a physical disability, and sympathy is often given. That's often not the case with psychiatric conditions.

"It's never going to be perfect," he said. "I understand there's never going to be perfection, and there's always going to be instances of him acting what most people

will perceive as being negative. But he has improved. I know there are times when he will actually calm himself down and use a breathing technique, and I say, 'Are you learning that from Jess (his counselor)?' and he'll tell me, 'Yes,' and that's very good."

Thomas Baffuto, executive director of the Arc of New Jersey, said he was optimistic lawmakers would restore Monmouth Arc's psychiatric service, but he said other services for the IDD remain at risk. They include a $497,000 grant the statewide organization has used to help residents make the transition when the age out of school programs

The Murphy administration defended its record, noting it has added $2.5 billion to programs helping individuals with developmental disabilities during its tenure.

It has increased wages to $21 an hour for workers who treat people with IDD, and it is proposing another $18 million in wage hikes for the upcoming fiscal year. And it added thousands of beds for adults with IDD, helping reduce a long waiting list for services, said Eva Loayza-McBride, a spokeswoman for the New Jersey Department of Human Services.

One concern: New Jersey could lose hundreds of millions of dollars in federal aid for disability services If Congress moves ahead with $880 billion in Medicaid cuts, Loayza-McBride said. Congress and the White House is controlled by the Republican Party, while the state Legislature and governor's mansion are controlled by Democrats.

'Night to Shine': Dancing, dinner and glamour for people with disabilities at Tim Tebow gala in Toms River

U.S. Rep. Jeff Van Drew, R-N.J., has said he won't support a bill that reduces coverage for "vulnerable populations." But analysts say policymakers can't attain that level of savings simply by eliminating waste and fraud; they will need to reduce coverage as well.

"Our focus remains on ensuring that the essential needs of the IDD community are met, even as we navigate these challenging financial circumstances," Loayza-McBride said. "We are dedicated to working collaboratively with stakeholders and partners to find innovative solutions and maintain the quality and accessibility of services for those we serve."

Finding a replacement for Monmouth Arc's behavioral health service wouldn't be easy, Robert Angel said. He noted people with IDD can be difficult to diagnose because they have cognitive and communicative difficulties, which can mimic psychiatric issues.

"The professionals that are dealing with these folks, this is a lifetime's work for them," Angel said.

Michael L. Diamond is a business reporter for the Asbury Park Press. He has been writing about the New Jersey economy and health care industry since 1999. He can be reached at mdiamond@gannettnj.com.