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Arizona **Penny-Wise, Pound Foolish** Budget crisis exacts a human cost

By: [Dennis Godfrey](#) | Source: AARP Bulletin Today | May 1, 2009



Idolina Moreno saw progress after Family Builders worked with her five children, including Wilver, 6, on cooperation and anger management. But the program was cut to help bridge the state's \$1.6 billion shortfall. Photo by Laura Segall

Idolina Moreno is a victim of Arizona's budget crisis: One state program that helped her family no longer exists, and another is threatened.

When police officers visited Moreno's house in Phoenix earlier this year to investigate a report of possible physical abuse to a child, they found nothing that warranted charges, but they found a family that needed help. Moreno was put in touch with Family

Builders, a state program that contracts with private organizations to provide family support and training services.

“What I saw was a mother that really wanted to do well for her children,” said Rosa Solis, a family support specialist who taught Moreno parenting skills. She worked with the children on cooperation and anger management.

“Since she’s been coming, my family has changed,” said Moreno, who is separated. “Every time I got a problem with my children, I can call them and they’re right here for me.”

That’s not true anymore. The Family Builders program has been suspended. Now Moreno worries that her five children—ranging in age from 18 months to 14—will regress. “I feel sad, because I can see the progress with my children and myself,” she said.

There is also a possibility that Moreno might lose help from another source. Her 6-year-old son, Wilver, is autistic. He’s been getting therapy directly from a state agency. But caseworkers have warned Moreno that program also may be suspended.

“What’s going to happen to my son? What’s going to happen to us? I don’t know. I have no clue,” she said.

Arizona’s deepening budget crisis—a \$1.6 billion shortfall this year and a projected \$3 billion in the fiscal year that begins July 1—is not just numbers on paper. It’s hurting real people as one social service program after another is reduced or eliminated:

- Because of state agency furloughs and staff reductions, not all reports of abuse and neglect to children and vulnerable adults will be investigated.
- Respite care for those caring for the developmentally disabled has been eliminated.
- Grandparents caring for their grandchildren will lose a \$75-a-month stipend.
- Independent living support for 450 Arizonans over age 60 has been eliminated.
- Applications for food stamps, cash assistance and Medicaid benefits will be delayed.
- About 1,500 people awaiting Social Security Administration disability claims will no

longer get a \$150-a month state subsidy.

- Subsidies to foster care families will be reduced.
- Support to domestic violence shelters has been cut. As a result, some victims will be denied shelter.
- Support for homeless shelters has been cut.

More cuts are likely as the Republican-controlled legislature, traditionally averse to tax increases, wrestles with next year's budget.

"The consequences, frankly, are horrendous," said Lupe Solis, AARP Arizona's associate director for advocacy. [AARP Arizona](#) is urging legislators not to cut social and health services further.

Enrique Vargas is a supervisor in the Tolleson office of the [Arizona's Children Association](#), which offers child welfare, foster care and other support programs in all 15 Arizona counties. Vargas said problems are "getting bigger because they want to save money to cut a program that costs pennies."

Sue Krahe, executive director of a nonprofit Tucson organization, [Our Family Services](#), which has lost about half a million dollars in state money, offers a similar view.

"I just know that people are going to need more help than ever because of all the economic factors," Krahe said. "Those services being cut are basic-need services. I'm just not sure what's going to happen."

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