

Skilled nursing facilities clear first hurdle

Skilled nursing facilities throughout California are cautiously optimistic about their future with this week's 17-0 bipartisan vote that would reverse Medi-Cal cuts to health care providers.

Assembly Bill 900 was before the Assembly Health Committee on April 30.

Now it goes to the Assembly Appropriations Committee and then to the full Assembly. If AB900 were to move out of the Assembly, then it would go through a similar path on the Senate side.



Barton Skilled Nursing Facility's healing garden.
Photo/Provided

"This is anticipated to be a tough process and we still have a long way to go. The results of AB900 not passing will be that many facilities will have to close their doors," Mary Bittner, vice president of nursing and ancillary services for Barton Health, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Barton Memorial's Skilled Nursing Facility is one of those care centers that is threatened with closure if reimbursements

are cut. The 48-bed skilled-nursing and short-stay rehabilitation facility often runs at capacity.

Mostly it's lower income older people who live at the South Lake Tahoe facility. The center provides around-the-clock care for aging adults.

In the last five years, approximately one-third or 40 hospital-based skilled-nursing facilities in California have closed because of financial reasons, according to the California Hospital Association.

Throughout the state Medi-Cal beneficiaries make up nearly 80 percent of the patients receiving hospital-based skilled-nursing care. Barton relies on these reimbursements, too.

The California Hospital Association believes AB900 is necessary to reverse Medi-Cal cuts to health care providers.

“Although these reductions amount to a 10 percent reduction for doctors and most other health care providers, the payment cuts are much deeper – averaging 25 percent or greater – for hospital-based skilled-nursing units,” the association said in a statement. “The consequence would be cutbacks and closures that would tear a hole in California’s safety net, rip families apart, and punish the most vulnerable and sick among us. Families would be forced to relocate their loved ones to another facility, perhaps hundreds of miles away.”

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*