

# Hospitals fear cuts, closures

Gov. Jon Corzine's proposed state budget alarmed some top hospital and health care officials yesterday, who warned his plan to slash more than \$100 million in charity care payments for uninsured patients would force cash-strapped hospitals to close.

Corzine's new budget dedicates \$608 million to the charity care fund — \$108 million less than New Jersey's 78 hospitals shared this year, according to a preliminary budget his administration released yesterday — and even that will shrink.

"New Jersey only has 78 community hospitals left, down from 112 hospitals from 20 years ago," said Betsy Ryan, New Jersey Hospital Association president-elect and chief operating officer. "I can assure you many of these 78 hospitals will not survive this budget."

Four hospitals closed in 2007 and four more have said they plan to close this year, including Greenville Hospital in Jersey City.

The budget relies on the recent report from the Commission on Rationalizing Health Care Resources, which concluded there are too many hospital beds in the state. The report recommended the state support the most viable "safety net" hospitals, which treat a proportionately large number of uninsured people.

With the charity care pool shrinking, Sen. Joseph Vitale, D-Middlesex, and Assemblyman Louis Greenwald, D-Camden, said it is time to consider major reforms to the health care system. Both lawmakers plan to unveil separate legislation in the coming months.

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