Expected cuts lead to layoffs in local program for kids

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CHILLICOTHE -- Public health early intervention services for children have taken a hit in expectation of state cuts.

The Ross County Health District's Help Me Grow program has laid off four service coordinators. The coordinators normally work with expectant parents through those with 3 year olds in their homes.

The local program is anticipating a $86,998 cut as of the current state biennium budget. The number could change before the governor is presented the final version at the end of the month.

The cut means infants and toddlers who aren't classified as having disabilities will no longer be served, said health commissioner Timothy Angel.

As for those with disabilities, they have to be provided services in accordance with the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

"We're working to try to do some creative development, a hybrid of the system," Angel said.

In place of service coordinators, the district board approved a change of the positions to home visitors. Existing public health nurses will take on home visit duties in addition to current duties to assist the program.

Eligibility and how the program will adjust still is being evaluated.

The health district also is expecting to receive cuts in the Women, Infants and Children program in this year. Angel told the board there is a possibility states will receive a 20 percent cut to funds for the program.

"We are facing cuts in 2012, no doubt about it. We just don't know how much yet ...This is kind of a shock when the feds are making cuts to the program because they've always held the program in high esteem," Angel said.

WIC provides federal grants to states for supplemental foods, healthcare referrals and nutrition education for low-income pregnant and postpartum women as well as to infants and children up to age 5.

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