

Medicaid money fights bedbugs

Report: State helping more poor, elderly or disabled Ohioans hit by infestations

With growing numbers of poor, elderly Ohioans unable to afford a bedbug fight, the state is dipping into Medicaid money intended for in-home services to pay for eradication.

The total so far isn't significant by state-budget standards - an estimated \$350,000 in the past year - but officials warn that the problem has the potential to become much more costly.

A report released yesterday by the Ohio Bed Bug Workgroup said the state is using the home-care funds to cover the cost of extermination preparation, and in some cases, the actual extermination of insects, for clients who receive in-home services.

"Left unchecked, costs for bed bug extermination could grow to significantly impact Medicaid waiver budgets," the report said.

Officials at the Ohio Department of Aging say most of the bedbug expenses are for clients in its popular PASSPORT program, which provides home-care services so that people can avoid nursing homes.

About 350 of the program's 31,000 clients have been affected by bedbugs in the past year, said the department's Jo Ellen Walley.

The program has long allowed for pest-management expenses, Deputy Director Roland Hornbostel said. "It's not a new category," he said. "But bedbugs are."

The work group, headed by Dr. Alvin Jackson, chief of the Ohio Department of Health, said in its report that poor, elderly and disabled Ohioans continue to be disproportionately tormented by infestations, largely because they can't pay for eradication.

But extermination money isn't the only issue. The state also needs more effective pesticides, improved public awareness and better coordination between the state and local agencies working on the bedbug problem, the report said.

"The scope of this issue is such that it literally has the ability to impact every single Ohioan if left unaddressed," Jackson wrote in the group's report. He said that "communities are being overtaken" by the bloodsucking insects, which spread easily and are difficult to kill with commonly available pesticides.

Bethany Dohnal, spokeswoman for the Central Ohio Bed Bug Task Force, said no one sees an end in sight. "It's ever-growing," she said.

The report includes 10 recommendations and numerous strategies for improving the response, including a continued push to get the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to grant approval for the use of Propoxur and to work toward the development of new pesticides.

The report also says the state should develop a website, hire a state bedbug coordinator and operate a toll-free information line.

By [Rita Price](#) January 6, 2011 THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH BEDBUG REPORT