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Director braces for cuts in budget

By Lydia Seabol Avant, Staff Writer

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TUSCALOOSA | Jim Reddoch has been the executive director of Indian Rivers Mental Health Center for only two weeks, but he's already bracing for the possibility of drastic state budget cuts while also trying to improve Indian Rivers' service in the community.



Dusty Compton | The Tuscaloosa News

Jim Reddoch, seen in his office Tuesday, is the new director of Indian Rivers. Reddoch is the former director of Bryce and Taylor Hardin and the former associate commissioner of the Alabama Department of Mental Health.

Indian Rivers serves about 6,000 patients a year in Tuscaloosa, Pickens and Bibb counties, providing care from psychiatry and therapy on an outpatient basis to managing residential services and group homes for people with mental illness and developmental disabilities.

The center's mission is at risk from looming budget cuts.

The Legislature has not finalized the General Fund budget for the 2012-13 fiscal year, but the Alabama Department of Mental Health is expected to be cut by as much as 25 percent. Much of that likely will have to come from community care, Reddoch said.

In addition, the 25 community mental health centers in the state, including Indian Rivers, have been asked to make \$3 million in cuts this fiscal year and are looking at 6 to 9 percent proration for the current budget on top of that.

Reddoch said he would have some great goals for programming for mental health in Tuscaloosa County, if it was "business as usual."

But it's not.

"Things are going to change and change in a big way," he said, referring to the state budget regarding mental health care. "We are trying to adjust to the change, but don't know the parameters yet."

Reddoch is used to the state budgetary process. He began his career with the state government as the legal adviser for former Gov. Guy Hunt. He then went on to serve as the deputy commissioner for the Alabama Department of Mental Health, a role which had him visit all of the mental health facilities in the state.

In 1992, he came to Tuscaloosa, first as the director of Bryce Hospital and then as the director of Taylor Hardin Secure Medical Facility, a position he held from 2000 until his retirement in 2009.

Reddoch said his career in mental health will help him in his new role because he's visited every mental health facility in the state and has a good grasp of every mental health "delivery system" in Alabama. He also understands the budgetary process.

Although the specifics regarding budget cuts to the ADMH are not known, it's likely that the mental illness division, which includes the 25 community mental health

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centers and six state hospital facilities, will bear the brunt of the cuts, Reddoch said.

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It's not known exactly where the cuts will be made, but they could have a drastic impact on the state's mental health clients, he said.

"I've seen that in other states who have downsized too much, that the mental health population ends up being served in the jails and under bridge overpasses," Reddoch said.

Despite the fiscal crisis, Reddoch hopes to eventually step up Indian Rivers' services.

"I'd like be sure that Indian Rivers is doing everything we are supposed to do in the community," he said. "I appreciate that Indian Rivers has had a great reputation for years, but I don't think we are doing everything we can do."

That includes having case managers work with Indian Rivers clients to ensure that people take their medications and go to doctor's appointments. In recent years, there have been no case managers at Indian Rivers, he said.

"That is a critical component in keeping people out of the hospitals," Reddoch said.

For now, Reddoch said he is trying to focus on making Indian Rivers more efficient and continue to serve the community in the best way possible.

Reddoch describes his management style as "MBWA," or "management by walking around." He said it's important to talk to staff members and the consumers that they serve.

It's also something he enjoys most about his job, interacting with the people he helps.

"At the end of the day, I want to know that I've done something that counted, that had a meaningful impact," Reddoch said.