

## **Health commissioner: Cuts in Rx drug aid may have 'unintended consequences'**

ALBANY - Under persistent questioning by state legislators, the new state health commissioner expressed doubts about the large cuts in the state's EPIC program

"Already folks have had to say do we feed the kids or do we take our medications or do we see the doctor?" said Commissioner Nirav Shah. "Unfortunately, there will be pain everywhere."

For 25 years the state has helped low and moderate income elderly buy the drugs they need to keep going. Single seniors under \$35,000 a year income, married seniors below \$50,000.

"If I have to pay more for my prescriptions it's really going to hurt me," said EPIC client Daryl Freedman of Troy. "I'm living on \$500 a month."

Shah could not tell legislators how many seniors will be hurt by the EPIC program cutbacks.

Senior advocates estimate 200,000 New Yorkers. Most get between \$30 and \$100 a month subsidy.

The governor expects to save \$58 million next year by taking away the coverage.

"Every place that somebody would be able to turn may disappear at the same time they may lose their ability to get the very drugs that they need to continue to live," one legislator observed at a budget hearing.

"I appreciate your concern and I share it," said Shah. "I think the nature of the process has been such that we've had to meet very aggressive targets with very gross tools. Initially and over time very quickly we'll understand how these unintended consequences may resolve."