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National Association of Area Agencies on Aging

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Statement by Sandy Markwood, CEO
*President's Budget Would Undermine Efforts to Keep Millions of
Older Americans Independent and Out of Poverty*

Washington, DC— Yesterday, President Trump sent to Congress his first full budget outline for FY 2018. The National Association of Area Agencies on Aging (n4a), which represents the nation's 622 Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs) that develop and deliver local aging programs and services to millions of older adults and their caregivers, and advocates in DC for the more than 250 Title VI Native American aging programs, is gravely concerned about how the budget could affect vital community supports.

“The Trump Administration’s budget plan is largely bad news for vulnerable older adults and struggling caregivers, as the proposals would, if enacted by Congress, put at risk the health, safety and independence of many low-income seniors,” said n4a CEO Sandy Markwood.

“We urge Congress to reject these drastic cuts and provide funding in FY 2018 that reflects the needs of our nation’s rapidly increasing aging population and supports the cost-effective home and community-based aging services that successfully address those needs in every community across the country.”

“If enacted, the Trump budget would eliminate a large number of major federal programs that help low-income older adults meet their basic needs, find jobs to make ends meet, give back to their communities through volunteerism, get one-on-one help understanding their Medicare and other benefits, and live independently at home and in the community, avoiding more expensive nursing home care. And if that’s not enough of a concern, the budget cuts Medicaid by \$600 billion over 10 years, a massive disinvestment in our nation’s primary safety net health and long-term care program.”

“One bright spot in the budget is that the President wisely preserves the Older Americans Act programs and services funded through the Administration on Aging. Although the level funding proposed will not allow local agencies to keep up with escalating demand,

we are grateful that these programs were spared cuts and can continue to offer older adults in communities nationwide in-home services, home-delivered and congregate meals, transportation, caregiver supports, evidence-based health and wellness programs and more.”

“However, these federal programs do not work in isolation. Local agencies and providers draw from a wide range of federal and state funding streams to create a patchwork of resources to help older consumers and their caregivers. For example, eliminating the State Health Insurance Assistance Program (SHIPs) would create undue pressure on Older Americans Act (OAA) III B Supportive Services, with consumers desperate for Medicare help reaching out to their Area Agency on Aging (two-thirds of which currently receive SHIP funding to provide this important service) through AAA information and referral lines, only to find there are no longer any SHIP-trained counselors available to help,” predicted Markwood.

“Without OAA Title V Senior Community Service Employment Program workers or Senior Corps volunteers, AAA workforces will be reduced, affecting how many people can be served. Most of these agencies receive block grant dollars (SSBG, CSBG, CDBG; see below) to supplement their limited OAA funding, so elimination will mean fewer meals, rides to the doctor and hours of in-home care provided to vulnerable older adults.”

“And finally, reductions to Medicaid and the long-term services and supports it provides to older adults and people with disabilities, will endanger the health and independence of millions of people. Currently, Medicaid funds two-thirds of long-term care nationally and cuts of this magnitude, building on the proposed cuts in the House’s Republican health care bill, will shift tremendous, unsustainable costs to states. We have no doubt that this will significantly reduce benefits and services to vulnerable older adults who need this level of care,” Markwood concluded.

Key Federal Programs Supporting Older Adults and Caregivers Eliminated in the President’s FY 2018 Budget

The **State Health Insurance Assistance Program (SHIP; Administration on Community Living, HHS)** provides one-on-one assistance and counseling to Medicare beneficiaries whose complex needs require more help than is provided by 1-800-Medicare or medicare.gov. Administered by the Administration for Community Living, SHIPs rely heavily on highly-trained volunteers and play a critical role in ensuring that older adults and people with disabilities make informed decisions about their Medicare coverage and navigate the complicated and shifting landscape of Medicare choices. SHIP counseling assistance can save individual Medicare beneficiaries hundreds, or even thousands, of dollars every year. (Roughly two-thirds of AAAs operate the local SHIP.) In FY 2016, the SHIP program received \$52.1 million. With 10,000 boomers becoming eligible for Medicare every day, SHIP funding should be increased to reflect the increasing number of clients and complexity of Medicare.

The **Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP; HHS)**, administered by the Department of Health and Human Services, helps low-income older adults afford their utility bills, so they can keep the lights on and stay warm in the winter and safely cool in the summer. While the program is not limited to seniors and helps a wide range of low-income households, the loss of this funding of more than \$3.4 billion would directly hurt the seniors who receive the financial help.

The **Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP; DOL)**, which is Title V of the Older Americans Act and administered by the Department of Labor, would also be eliminated in the Trump budget. Losing this \$434 million program—the only federal job training program focused on the unique needs of older workers—would immediately affect the approximately 70,000 age 55+ workers who receive skills training, job placement help and subsidized community service jobs annually. Without SCSEP, these very low-income seniors would struggle to find the employment that they need to make ends meet. The tens of thousands of community agencies who host many SCSEP workers would also lose millions of hours of staff support, making it more difficult to achieve their missions to serve older adults, children and youth, and other members of their community.

Three major community-focused federal block grants would be eliminated under the Trump Budget. The **Social Services Block Grant (SSBG; HHS)** provides critical flexible support to states to help vulnerable people of all ages to thrive and contribute to the well-being of our nation's communities. Communities across the nation rely on SSBG to help at-risk children and youth, people with disabilities; older adults in jeopardy of entering a nursing home or institution. SSBG is also the primary source of federal funding for Adult Protective Services (APS); for some states, SSBG is their only source of APS funding. Cutting SSBG harms vulnerable populations and fundamentally erodes the foundation of support in our communities that helps our country both weather hard times and thrive in times of economic growth.

The **Community Services Block Grant (CSBG; HHS)** provides states and localities with flexible funds to improve community health and living conditions for low-income families and seniors by funding free-standing programs. Also, when there is not enough funding in another community program to meet demand, CSBG funds provide supplemental support to expand the reach and impact of the existing program. For those age 55 and older, these services may include home-based household and personal care activities, nutritious home-delivered or congregate meals, Adult Protective Services or transportation to and from medical appointments. Approximately one in five individuals served by CSBG are age 55 or older and almost 8 percent are age 70 or older, which means roughly \$56 million of CSBG's total funding of \$715 million is directed to helping low-income older adults stay safe, healthy and living independently in the community.

The **Community Development Block Grant (CDBG; HUD)**, works to ensure decent affordable housing, to provide services to the most vulnerable in our communities, and to create jobs through the expansion and retention of businesses. CDBG is an important tool for helping local governments tackle serious challenges facing

their communities. To a limited degree, some localities use CDBG to supplement their existing home-delivered meals programs (often branded as “Meals on Wheels”).

Finally, the budget eliminates the **Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS)**, an independent agency which runs the long-standing, popular **Senior Corps** programs, specifically Foster Grandparents, Senior Companions and RSVP. Senior Corps is the only national program able to place large numbers of senior volunteers in high-quality volunteer positions, generating 96 million hours of service to communities. When older volunteers provide vital services in their communities, it also helps those volunteers remain engaged in society. Given the health benefits of volunteering, this is a win-win for older adults and the communities they serve.

About n4a

The National Association of Area Agencies on Aging (n4a) is a 501c(3) membership association representing America’s national network of 622 Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs) and providing a voice in the nation’s capital for the 256 Title VI Native American aging programs. The mission of n4a is to build the capacity of its members so they can better help older adults and people with disabilities live with dignity and choices in their homes and communities for as long as possible.

Learn more about the [Aging Services](#) provided by AAAs and Title VI programs. Find the [AAA and/or Title VI program](#) in your area.

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