Educate Your Members on Effects of Shutdown On Your Agency, Programs and Clients

October 11, 2013

With the federal government shutdown now ten days in, and with no clear resolution in sight, it is critical that AAA and Title VI directors, staff and other leaders—as well as community members who value Older Americans Act (OAA) programs and services—fully brief their federal elected officials on the effects of this impasse.

There are multiple ways to achieve this advocacy and we encourage you to customize your messages to your agency and community. What is most important is that we use this challenging state of affairs to remind Congress and the public of the value of discretionary programs like OAA, the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program, Social Services Block Grant and a host of other federal investments that directly help older adults and caregivers in your community. This education effort should definitely include working with your local media to get the story out to the public!

Little has changed legislatively or politically since the shutdown began on October 1, although n4a is tracking all relevant proposals to restore discretionary funding via a continuing resolution (CR), prevent a debt ceiling breach at the end of next week, or make other substantial changes to federal programs that support seniors and their families.

n4a’s Take

In the short term, n4a urges Congress to pass a “clean” (e.g., no extraneous provisions) CR that is at least one month long so that federal funds can begin to flow again. Then it is vital that a higher level of funding is provided for the full fiscal year—the CR levels being discussed are far too low and keep the sequester in place.

We also believe that the debt ceiling must be raised immediately to avoid government default and all the other negative economic outcomes of such a dangerous scenario.

Should a larger deficit deal be reached in conjunction with ending the shutdown or averting a default, n4a believes it should include an end to sequestration. The nation can and should reduce the deficit over time through a balanced approach that includes budget savings from increases in revenues and thoughtful, targeted reductions in spending when and where necessary. Any plan approved must protect those older adults and all Americans in greatest need, both socially and economically, by fairly
balancing revenues and spending, protecting low-income Americans and, ultimately, taking no actions that increase economic vulnerability or poverty.

**Action Requested**

1> **Write a letter or memo to your Representatives and Senators** regarding what the effects of the federal government shutdown, now and in the near term, mean to the work of your agency. Weave in the already existing effects of sequestration. Especially take the time to localize what this funding gap means for the older adults and people with disabilities in your state and community. (Let us know if you need an example from another AAA; and please share your letters with us!)

2> **Share it widely with...**

- **Congressional offices:** Email or fax it to any and all contacts you have in their local or DC offices. While roughly half of Senate offices are closed, most House offices are open, although all open Capitol Hill offices have widely varying levels of staff and constituent service. Most report that they continue to monitor incoming emails via their website and constituent calls, so do not be deterred!
- **The Media:** Share your memo with local media outlets. If you can also provide some compelling stories of what the shutdown means for your staff and/or clients, we believe they will be very interested.
- **Your Network, Allies and the Public:** We know you will want to inform your providers and other partner networks, but please also find creative ways to share your agency’s realities with the broader public. For example, notify the public of any service or staffing reductions with clear language about the direct effect of the sequester and/or shutdown on these changes, perhaps on your email taglines or posted prominently on your website.
  - If you can, consider adding a simple advocacy component, such as in this email signature example: “The Amos County AAA regrets that due to the cumulative effects of federal sequestration (i.e., budget cuts) and the current federal government shutdown, we are unable to respond to your request in our usual timely fashion. We apologize for any inconvenience this may cause and urge you to contact your U.S. Representative and Senators with any feedback on this matter.”
  - Or for your website: “The following AAA-funded community program sites have been directly impacted by the federal shutdown. Please read on for information on reduced hours or changes in schedule. We regret any inconvenience and hope to resume full operations once we receive our FY 2014 federal funding. If this negatively affects your ability to access services, please contact our area’s Congressional delegation (list Members with links to their websites or provide phone numbers).”

2> **If you can, take the next step!** Use the talking points below to craft your own localized, consumer-friendly Advocacy Alert and share widely in your area. This may be something to outsource to your Advisory Board or other community activists.

**Talking Points to Customize for Community Alerts:**

- The federal government shutdown threatens the stability of many of our city’s aging services programs such as the AAA’s information and referral and case management services, daily evidence-based health programs for seniors at the River Street Wellness and Nutrition Center, deliveries by Amos County Meals on Wheels, senior transportation services across the county
and much, much more. Thirty percent of our funding for these vital services comes from federal funding under the Older Americans Act.

- Until the government shutdown is ended and adequate funding is provided to the Older Americans Act programs and services, we cannot guarantee that these lifeline services can continue uninterrupted.
- This impasse puts the most frail and vulnerable seniors in our community at risk. While our agency is doing all that we possibly can to avoid any harms to our clients, this federal funding shutdown presents a major challenge. The longer it continues, the harder it becomes to preserve programs and services.
- Without this support, some seniors will end up in more expensive nursing home care, which simply drives costs to Medicaid.
- Tell Congress to resume federal funding immediately for programs like the Older Americans Act!
- Take just five minutes and call/email your U.S. Representatives and Senators. You can reach them all via the Capitol Switchboard (202-224-3121) or their websites (www.house.gov / www.senate.gov). It’s easy to do this—simply tell them you are worried about the effect of this shutdown on aging services programs and urge them to resolve this as soon as possible.

If you have questions about this Advocacy Alert, please contact n4a’s Senior Director, Public Policy and Advocacy Amy Gotwals at agotwals@n4a.org or n4a’s Manager, Public Policy Neal Karkhanis at nkarkhanis@n4a.org.