Take Action! Tell Congress Exactly How Sequestration Will Affect Older Adults & Caregivers in Your Community

November 14, 2012

What Congress and the White House do in the next few weeks may determine health and aging funding for years to come. The work on sequestration that aging advocates have done since summer is coming to a head; with the election over, Congress must finally pay full attention to the looming sequester and other pressing fiscal decisions that make up the so-called “fiscal cliff.”

While these fiscal issues are large and complex, it is critical that aging advocates engage in this national conversation, especially to speak for the frail, vulnerable older adults and overworked caregivers you serve.

The time is NOW: The White House is hosting key House and Senate leaders this week to begin negotiations on deficit reduction. It is possible that a large deficit deal, or at least an agreement on the broad outlines of one, could be struck before the end of this year. While n4a supports averting the sequester, we also care about any changes to mandatory programs (e.g., Medicare, Medicaid) that could harm beneficiaries, and feel strongly that any deficit reduction deal must be balanced and include raising revenues.

n4a has developed new tools for you to use to reach out to Congress and to engage other advocates in your community. Our new budget campaign webpage (http://www.n4a.org/advocacy/campaigns/?fa=2012-13-budget-campaign) has a primer on the fiscal cliff; talking points on potential cuts/reforms; fact sheets and state-by-state data on the negative effects of sequestration; a sample op-ed to place in your local media; and advocacy success stories and tools from your colleagues around the country.

n4a members will get the latest developments via our Legislative Updates in the weeks to come, but we urge all advocates to weigh in today with your entire congressional delegation. Please let n4a know how your efforts are going: agotwals@n4a.org, nkarkhanis@n4a.org.

Action Steps to Take:

STEP 1: Sequestration Data Collection and Calculation. Take the most recent and complete data for Older Americans Act programs and services you have delivered (e.g., last fiscal year or
averages based on FY 2012 thus far) in your area. Then reduce those outputs by 8.2 percent and translate that reduction into what it means for clients’ lives.

For example, how many people currently receiving medical transportation would lose services if these cuts occur? How many fewer meals will you be able to serve? How many caregivers would face reduced hours of respite care? If you can, extrapolate that information into real consequences for older adults: compromised health, poorer nutrition, increased isolation, higher risk of falls, etc. It is up to you which specific services you highlight, but please do include several different examples of Older Americans Act subtitles to ensure your Senators and Representatives understand the effect of slashing your federal funding sources.

STEP 2: Assemble Your Messages Into A Letter. Let them know who you are, what your agency does, then get right to the point: “The planned January 2013 sequester would be devastating to our community’s aging programs and services seriously jeopardizing older adults ability to live safely and independently at home. After years of stagnant or reduced funding, our agency has nothing left to squeeze out of the budget, so a sequester would directly hurt the older adults and caregivers we help every day. Here’s how…[insert your data messages]” End by asking them what their plan is for averting this dangerous budgetary gimmick.

Add-On #1: The next few weeks are the battleground for whether the deal will include raising significant revenues. If revenues are not on the table, discretionary and mandatory programs will be hit that much harder. If you are comfortable, please raise this issue (see our talking points) in your letter as well.

Add-On #2: n4a recognizes that the health and well-being of older adults may also be affected by cuts to Medicare, Medicaid or even Social Security. As you see fit, raise those concerns as well. If you choose to focus solely on sequestration and/or a balanced approach, that’s fine too. n4a will customize messages on Medicare and Medicaid as the debate evolves.

STEP 3: Communicate your message to all of your Representatives and Senators! To find contact information for their state offices, visit their websites, which you can find at: www.senate.gov and www.house.gov.

There are several ways to accomplish this, but everyone should do #1 and then go from there—
1) Fax, hand deliver or email your letter to the district office closest to you, being sure to also email their DC offices. (Please send a cc: to n4a Public Policy and Advocacy team.)

2) Adapt n4a’s sample op-ed to your local area and push all local media (print and online) to publish it.

3) Tweet your Members of Congress. The NDD Coalition, of which n4a is a member, is encouraging tweets on sequestration this Thursday, November 15. But if you miss that timeline, do it another day and the week after that. Weave stats on who will be left behind from sequestration into the tweet and be sure to address it to the Member so that their staff see the citation.

STEP 4: Ask others to do the same! Urge colleagues, advisory board members, volunteers and clients to send their own letters and emails to Congress.

If you have questions about this Advocacy Alert, please contact n4a’s Public Policy and Advocacy staff, Amy Gotwals and Neal Karkhanis, at 202.872.0888 or agotwals@n4a.org, nkarkhanis@n4a.org.