It’s Time to Get Loud Again!
Tell Congress Exactly How Sequestration Will Affect Older Adults & Caregivers in Your Community

January 31, 2013

In 2012, hundreds of you wrote to your Members of Congress, submitted op-eds and letters to the editor, crafted press releases, shared your concerns via social media and worked with others in your community expressing your concerns about the impact the looming sequestration could have on the critical services and supports your agency provides to vulnerable older adults.

We hope you rested your voices in the past few weeks, because it is critical that all aging advocates immediately become re-engaged on this issue. As our January 28 Legislative Update detailed, the new sequestration date of March 1 is only a month away and the prognosis for averting these arbitrary, across-the-board cuts now totaling $85.3 billion has only grown more grim. For a variety of reasons, many Members of Congress are increasingly willing to consider letting the sequester take effect.

While n4a is engaged on the full breadth of larger deficit reduction and other budget issues, we believe the most immediate risk to the health and safety of older adults aging in communities is from the sequester’s 5.1 percent cuts to programs like the Older Americans Act, LIHEAP, Social Services Block Grant, Section 202 Housing and others. The impact would be a total of $31.4 billion in cuts to all domestic discretionary programs plus a $11.2 billion Medicare cut to providers; the other half would come from defense discretionary spending.

We need you to take action this week and next! Contact your Senators and Representatives about the damage the sequester would do to the federally funded programs for older adults and caregivers in your community. More importantly, speak to what those cuts would mean for the seniors and their families directly. The only way for us to fight the sequester is to put a real face and data to the effect it would have.

Action Steps to Take

STEP 1: Sequestration Data Collection and Re-Calculation.
Unfortunately, you need to re-crunch your numbers relative to how programs and people will be reduced under sequestration. Our approach is similar to last time, but updated to reflect the new percentage of 5.1 and the reality that any cuts to FY 2013 would be concentrated in the remaining six months of the fiscal year. For simplicity’s sake, we are doubling the 5.1 to 10.2 to show how a 5.1 percent cut would have to be implemented in just six months.
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 10.2 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 full 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 March 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 the 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.

*Note:* The next few weeks are the battleground for whether the deal will include another round of raising revenue. 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 in your letter as well.

**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](http://www.senate.gov) and [www.house.gov](http://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. 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 sees the citation.

**STEP 4: Ask others to do the same!** Public engagement, and the media attention it garners, is critical to affecting if and how lawmakers confront the sequester in the short term and deficit reduction in the long term. In addition to contacting your Members of Congress, we encourage you to engage Advisory Board members, key activists and clients in your community to do the same. This is the time to stretch your advocacy to its fullest potential!

**Key Questions & Answers**

*Why 5.1 vs. 8.2 percent?*

The American Taxpayer Relief Act of 2012 (which prevented all income tax rates from rising when the Bush tax cuts expired) effectively paid for two months of the sequester for FY 2013. Since Congress has since passed other legislation (notably Hurricane Sandy relief), the pot of funds that will be cut has grown. When combined, these two factors means that the non-defense discretionary sequester level is now 5.1 percent. It’s important to note, however that the 5.1 applies to all of FY 2013 funding, but if effective March 1, only provides six months in which to implement the cut in funding.
Why Avert the Sequester When We Need to Do Deficit Reduction?

The shortest way to answer this is on the basis of fairness. Fairness across our federal expenditures (mandatory vs. discretionary) and balance between spending cuts and revenue raisers. Of the deficit reduction accomplished by the 112th Congress ($2.4 trillion including interest savings), a full 70 percent is from spending cuts. A large majority of those cuts were from the budget caps put on discretionary funding in 2011. If the sequester were to go through, the ratio of spending cuts to revenue increases would be 4 to 1. This is profoundly unfair to discretionary programs, which are a smaller portion of the budget than mandatory spending, and should not bear all the burden of deficit reduction. It’s equally unfair to have such a disproportionate penalty paid by the spending side of the ledger when there are reasonable revenue-raisers that should be considered if we are to reduce the deficit in a rational way and address the coming challenges of an aging population.

Resources and Tools

n4a has developed tools for you to use to reach out to Congress and to engage other advocates in your community. Our budget campaign webpage 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.

Because this issue is changing nearly daily, we would also recommend some trusted sources of emerging analysis and messaging.
Center on Budget and Policy Priorities http://www.cbpp.org/
NDD United (a massive coalition of which n4a is a member) http://publichealthfunding.org/index.php/ndd_united1/

If you have questions about this Advocacy Alert or can report back on your advocacy actions, 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.