n4a’s Analysis of the President’s FY 2018 Budget Blueprint

March 16, 2017

Today President Trump sent an outline to Congress of a FY 2018 budget that would dramatically alter the course of federal investments in both defense and non-defense discretionary funding. The “skinny” budget is an opening salvo to lawmakers, federal agencies and the country outlining the Trump Administration’s funding priorities. The budget does not contain many individual program line-items, so it is impossible to say exactly what funding levels the President proposes for many programs—including for Older Americans Act and other aging programs within the Administration for Community Living (ACL) and Administration on Aging (AoA).

However, overall, the budget increases defense programs by $54 billion by breaking current parity between non-defense (NDD) and defense discretionary programs, and slashing NDD programs by $54 billion overall. Top-line agency numbers in the Trump’s FY18 budget reflect deep cuts far below current budget caps and sequestration levels as mandated by the Budget Control Act of 2011. We don’t know exactly how the Trump Administration proposes to divvy up proposed NDD cuts among many specific programs, but top-line agency allocations suggest deep and concerning cuts will be proposed later this spring. The budget delivered to Capitol Hill does not outline the Administration’s proposals for mandatory spending, such as Medicare and Social Security, or for federal revenue and tax proposals; that, too, will come in the next budget round.

What We Know—and Don’t Know—About Older Americans Act (OAA) and Other Aging Programs

President Trump proposed funding the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), which houses the Administration for Community Living and its Administration on Aging, at $65.1 billion. This reflects a deep $12.6 billion cut (16.2 percent) from current funding. However, because the budget outline released today lacks many details on individual agency spending, we do not know exactly how this overall cut would affect most Older Americans Act programs. Roughly $10 billion of the overall cut to HHS comes from rolling back recent funding increases for the National Institutes of Health and from eliminating other block-grant programs.
President Trump proposed eliminating many workforce development programs including the OAA Title V **Senior Community Services Employment Program (SCSEP)**, housed within the Department of Labor. Last year, Senate appropriators targeted SCSEP for a $34 million cut to its $434 funding level, but the House lawmakers rejected that cut. The Trump budget would zero out the program entirely.

Within the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the President proposed cuts to rental assistance programs, which could include **Section 202 Supportive Housing for the Elderly**. Again, we don’t have details on exactly how these cuts would roll out, but overall HUD was slated for an 11.6 percent cut.

**Other Key Programs Slated for Elimination**

In addition to SCSEP, other programs on the chopping block that could affect services and support for older adults include the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), which includes the Senior Corps programs such as Foster Grandparents and RSVP; the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), which provides financial assistance for utility bills; the Community Services Block Grant, which provides wrap-around services for older adults in many communities; and the Legal Services Corporation, which administers some elder justice programs.

Additionally, the budget would eliminate funding within HUD for the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG). This $3 billion cut would eliminate CDBG funding to states to use for a variety of programs including a small amount that a few states and communities direct toward shoring up senior nutrition programs such as home-delivered meals. **However, this cut does not mean that the federal home-delivered meals program under the Older Americans Act was slated for elimination. Those details are not available in the current budget blueprint, but news reports of the CDBG cut have led to confusion among advocates and the public.**

**What’s Next for the FY 2018 Budget**

There is much to be concerned about in President Trump’s budget blueprint, and this budget clearly highlights the need for increased advocacy in every community. However, this is simply the first step in the budgeting process—and the Administration hasn’t even released its full budget outline, so it’s really a half step at this point.

While the President’s budget does begin the annual process of setting spending levels for all discretionary federal programs, it is simply a starting point for conversations with Congress. Lawmakers will ultimately have to draft their annual funding bills and send to the President for approval. Furthermore, Congress hasn’t yet finalized funding for FY 2017, and current funding, which expires at the end of April, will have to take priority.

In the coming weeks, Congress will hold hearings on some components of the President’s recommendations, but we have heard early objections from House and Senate appropriators on both sides of the aisle about the level of overall NDD Cuts in the President’s budget.
Once Congress finalizes FY 2017 funding and when the Administration sends full details to Congress, the House and Senate Appropriations subcommittees of jurisdiction make the specific programmatic determinations for each discretionary line item (e.g., a specific program such as OAA Title III B). This can take several months to move through committee, and larger or more contentious bills can take all summer or fall before being passed. Like all other legislation, the House and Senate must agree on appropriations bills. Achieving agreement further lengthens the process.

Despite the murky forecast at this point, the President’s recommendations can be used effectively by advocates as we begin our FY 18 appropriations campaign and continue our fight to stop sequestration and/or deeper NDD cuts. Here’s what’s coming soon:

- **n4a’s 2017 Policy Priorities**, which detail our positions on the most pressing policy issues of the day, will be released in a couple of weeks. All n4a members will receive a copy via mail after its release at the Aging Policy Briefing, April 3-4.

- **Stay tuned for n4a’s FY 2018 appropriations campaign**. n4a sent our appropriations request letter to Congress earlier this month, and has started scheduling meetings with lawmakers to discuss OAA funding for FY18. We will release resources for advocates in the very near future, so stay tuned for what you can do to push for maximum funding for Older Americans Act and other vital discretionary programs.

Stay tuned for more updates from n4a, and meanwhile...

**Come to DC! n4a’s Aging Policy Briefing will be held on Capitol Hill, April 3-4, and we need your participation.** Advocacy is needed now more than ever on many issues critical to older adults and caregivers. Join us at the n4a Aging Policy Briefing & Capitol Hill Day and make your voice heard on Capitol Hill! We are about to announce some excellent speakers, so don’t delay. Register Now!

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**This Legislative Update is an n4a membership benefit.** For more information about these and other federal aging policy issues, please contact n4a’s policy team: Amy Gotwals (agotwals@n4a.org) and Autumn Campbell (acampbell@n4a.org), 202.872.0888.