**The Clock is Ticking. It’s Time to Take Action!**

*Make Clear to Your Senators and Representatives How a Sequester*

 *Will Affect* *Older Adults & Caregivers in Your Community*

A sequester affecting *ALL* federal discretionary programs continues to loom large and threatens to seriously slash into aging program budgets.

***What Is a Sequester?***

To sequester means to set apart or to take something away until a debt has been repaid. In the context of funding federal programs, sequester means imminent, across-the-board cuts to most programs, both defense and nondefense—in addition to the $1 trillion in cuts already sustained through the Budget Control Act’s discretionary caps.

This will be across-the-board, with no departmental or agency control on how the sequester impacts individual programs. **Cuts of this level will be devastating to the public health and social services infrastructure**. For example, Senator Tom Harkin (D-IA) recently released a report speculating that, under a sequester, 17 million meals for seniors would be lost and 1.5 million fewer low-income people served by the Community Services Block Grant.

***Why Is This Sequester Happening?***

The Budget Control Act of 2011 established caps on discretionary spending over 10 years, resulting in $1 trillion in cuts spread across defense and non-defense discretionary (NDD) programs. The law also directed a congressional Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction to identify an additional $1.2 trillion in budgetary savings over 10 years. The failure of this bi-partisan committee to come to an agreement on a deficit reduction plan last fall triggered an automatic sequester to take effect on January 2, 2013.

**You need to let your Members of Congress know how the sequester will affect your community’s federally-funded programs** (e.g., Older Americans Act programs and services), your agency’s ability to meet the needs of your clients, and the ripple effects on the health and independence of older adults and caregivers.

**Action Steps to Take:**

**STEP 1: 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 7.8%\* [\*Note: Estimates on the cuts range from 7% to 9%, depending on unknown factors. Senator Harkin’s report used a 7.8 percent cut.] Now, translate that reduction into what it means for clients’ lives.

For example, how many people currently receiving medical transportation would now lose services? How many fewer meals will you be able to serve? How many caregivers would face reduced hours of respite care? Explain what this really means: poorer nutrition, compromised health, increased isolation, higher risk of falls, etc; all which lead to hospitalization or institutional care (all at much higher costs than OAA programs)

Include several different examples of OAA programs 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. 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 and messages]* End by asking them what their plan is for averting this sequester.

**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.

2) Request a meeting with the Member and/or his/her local staff.

3) Attend any public events/town halls they are hosting and bring this issue up!

4) Invite your legislators to make a site visitto local health prevention program or ride

 along with a Meals on Wheels volunteer; invite them to events you are hosting.

**STEP 4: Encourage others to do the same!**

Urge colleagues, advisory board members, volunteers and clients to send their own letters and emails to Congress. The more letters the better, especially from voters in the Legislators’ districts!