

Enough! Federal Cuts to Human Services Must End

The National Human Services Assembly is calling on service providers and their supporters to act now to urge Congress and the White House to end further cuts to human development programs, particularly those in the Non-Defense Discretionary budget.

The Budget Sequester, which resulted from the budget impasse between the White and the Congress (and, indeed, between the two Houses of Congress) cut \$85 billion from the Non-Defense Discretionary (NDD) budget, some \$30 billion of which is in programs and supports for children, families, older adults and people with disabilities. These programs, from food assistance for poor children and homebound elderly people to treatment for seriously mentally ill people, are much more than a safety net: they are critical lower rungs on the ladder to self-sufficiency and opportunity.

Those of us in the human services field know that many of the programs that help people reach and climb that ladder have already been cut repeatedly, but things are different now:

- The political talk is of cutting fat—presumably, programs that have been proven to be ineffective or that have bloated overhead—neither of which has or would likely be found for the majority of affected programs. The cuts are to muscle and bone, not fat. (See <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/special/politics/sequestration-state-impact/> for projected cuts by program and by state).
- NDD programs have already “given at the office,” repeatedly. While NDD spending increased somewhat in the past few years, mainly as a result of temporary “stimulus” spending, overall NDD funding as a percent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is well below where it was in the mid- and late-1970s, when the federal deficit was much smaller. If projected cuts in discretionary funding over the next decade occur, spending for important leg-up, opportunity programs will decrease by \$1.5 trillion between 2012 and 2022.
- NDD spending is less than one fifth - 17% percent - of overall federal spending and yet is one of the first sources budget makers attack to cut or eliminate the federal deficit. Congress needs to be helped to understand that NDD human services funding is not driving the deficit. These critical programs didn’t cause the deficit, and radically cutting them will contribute little to deficit reduction – but will harm millions of Americans and will contribute to even greater inequality not just of income but of opportunity.
- Research by the National Assembly and others suggest that taxpayers and their representatives—elected officials—don’t really “get” the language we use, the term, human services, included. Nor do most understand that the federal spending they think they oppose includes programs that benefit their friends and family and that they actually value.

We tend to educate and advocate in our various silos. Now it is clear that many worthwhile and critical programs are literally in the same boat (certainly in the same vulnerable budget). The National Assembly, a coalition of more than eighty of the nation’s leading human services networks, calls on its colleagues at the national, state and local levels to:

- Craft urgent, straightforward appeals that cite the issues as referred to above but with information on the impacts of cuts—current and proposed—on the work that your organization does and the needs of people it serves. Adapt this letter, write your own, or develop brief talking points with key facts or a sample letter to legislators or to the editor.
- Educate and empower your constituents—clients, supporters, board members, and others—to communicate the facts to their Members of Congress and to the White House. Use e-mail and social media.
- Communicate with and engage your own Senators and Congresspersons and the media (particularly in your vicinity) with these same facts and tell them, *Enough!*

Time is of the essence. The human services sector has a powerful message that must be understood. It is our duty to our clients and communities to see that it is; and to infuse the public discussion with information that providers are uniquely able to provide.

Sources:

Kogan, Richard, Congress Has Cut Discretionary Funding by \$1.5 Trillion Over Ten Years, Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, September 25, 2012, <http://www.cbpp.org/files/9-25-12bud.pdf>.

Linden, Michael, Budget Cuts Set Funding Path to Historic Lows, Center for American Progress, January 29, 2013, <http://www.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/LindenNonDefenseDiscretionarySpending.pdf>.

National Center of Nonprofits, The Devastating Impact of Sequestration Cuts, 2013, <http://www.givevoice.org/sites/default/files/image2/sequestration-infographic-lg.png>.

Center for Effective Government, Sequestration Central, <http://www.foreffectivegov.org/sequestration-central>

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