



Tell Congress to Say NO to: Trump Budget Cuts that Risk the Independence, Economic Security, Safety of Seniors

May 31, 2017

On May 23, President Trump released his first full budget, for Fiscal Year (FY) 2018. A President's budget is a blueprint of his Administration's policy goals, driving year-to-year spending on specific programs, but also looking out ten years at larger budget issues. But a President's budget only becomes a reality if Congress agrees—they hold the power of the purse.

Though programs serving older Americans under the Older Americans Act (OAA) were primarily level funded (at least those administered by the Administration for Community Living), **President Trump's budget eliminates many other key federal programs that provide funding to state and local efforts to support older adults in our community and others! One of the key programs the President has proposed for elimination is the State Health Insurance Assistance Program (SHIP)**. Wisconsin received over \$1 million in SHIP funding in 2016-17. Those funds were used by SHIP counselors to handle over 86,000 customer contacts and conduct 2,555 public outreach events. SHIP funds in Wisconsin support the Medigap Hotline, face-to-face benefits counseling at local aging units and Aging and Disability Resource Centers (ADRCs), support for volunteers who contributed over 5,300 hours to SHIP agencies, and much more (DHS, DPH, P-00166, April 2017). **The Administration also proposed significantly reducing federal investments in workforce development and volunteer-based programs. This includes eliminating the Older Americans Act (OAA) Title V Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP)**. In program year 2014-15, Wisconsin SCSEP participants provided over 940,000 hours of subsidized community service to public and non-profit agencies, allowing these agencies to enhance and provide needed services to the community, while older workers gain job skills. Over one hundred, ninety-one (191), Wisconsin SCSEP participants were placed into permanent employment during this period. **Also included in the President's budget is the elimination of the Senior Corps programs (RSVP, Foster Grandparents, and Senior Companion)** under the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS). Wisconsin has 7,700 Senior Corps volunteers. Of these volunteers, Foster grandparents tutored 4,500 young people, RSVP volunteers provided service to 720 local organizations, and Senior Companions helped 460 homebound seniors (<https://www.nationalservice.gov/sites/default/files/upload/SCState-WI-01.png>).

Also on the chopping block are critical state and community block grant programs – Community Services Block Grant, Social Services Block Grant, and Community Development Block Grant - often

used to supplement and support the work of the Aging Network. Last, but certainly not least, the President proposes zeroing out funding for the **Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program** (LIHEAP) that helps low-income households and families, including many older adults, with heating and energy bills.

These programs help low-income older adults meet their basic needs, find jobs to make ends meet, give back to their communities through volunteerism, get one-on-one help understanding their Medicare and other benefits, and live independently at home and in the community, avoiding more expensive nursing home care. And if that's not enough to be concerned about, **the budget cuts Medicaid by \$610 billion over 10 years**, a massive disinvestment in our nation's primary safety net health and long-term care program.

Please reach out to your Members of Congress *immediately* to share your concerns with the cuts proposed by the Trump Administration! Congress must hear from seniors, caregivers, service providers and other stakeholders about the importance of the federal programs that drive local innovation and provide life-saving home and community-based services to our nation's most vulnerable older adults and their caregivers.

How to Take Action:

- **Put Your Concerns in Writing.**

If you can, put your concerns in a letter then fax it to your Representatives and Senators. You can also email, but a fax will draw more notice. You can find your Members' fax numbers on their websites (www.house.gov and www.senate.gov) and you can email them right from that same site. You will also find contact information for your federal legislators on the Greater Wisconsin Agency on Aging Resources (GWAAR) website at: <http://www.gwaar.org/images/stories/Advocacy/Wisconsin-Members-of-Congress-115th.pdf>.

AND/OR

- **Make a Few Short Phone Calls.**

Phone lines are busy these days, but if you'd rather call than write your Senators and Representative, this is an easy way to be heard! To reach Congress: either use the Capitol Switchboard (202.224.3121) to reach DC offices, or look up your Members' district office phone numbers on their websites or at the link on GWAAR's website above.

Sample Letter or Email:

Dear Senator [OR] Representative [LAST NAME]:

I am writing to express my concern about and to ask you to oppose the drastic cuts proposed by the Trump Administration that would undermine the health, independence and economic security of millions of older adults and caregivers.

[IDENTIFY YOURSELF AS A CONSTITUENT AND SHARE ANY RELEVANT PERSONAL INFORMATION YOU FEEL COMFORTABLE SHARING. For example, "I live in the town of X with my husband who is living with Alzheimer's. I am his primary caregiver, but he also receives in-home services from Medicaid which allows us to be able to stay in our home of 45 years."]

As I understand it, the Trump budget makes significant cuts to Medicaid and many federal programs that send money from Washington to where it's most needed: our communities, virtually all of which have more older adults this year than last—and that trend will only continue for the next few decades!

It makes no sense to cut federal support for the locally provided community services that help older adults remain independent, stay safe and healthy, and make ends meet. With more Americans living longer, we should be investing in our safety net programs at a time like this, not cutting them!

[NOTE: Remember to add your own thoughts, experiences with aging at home and in the community and the local programs with federal funding that help! You can also adapt/add any or all of the talking points below; it's the advocate's choice!]

Thank you for considering my views on this matter and I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

[YOUR NAME and FULL MAILING ADDRESS]

Talking Points on the 2018 Trump Budget:

Medicaid is Critical to the Health and Well-Being of Many Older Adults

- The Trump budget builds on the cuts in the House-passed American Health Care Act (AHCA) and further cuts Medicaid by \$610 billion, both acute care and long-term care. It does this by capping the amount of money the federal government contributes to Medicaid, which means states will be on the hook to cover federal cuts. States cannot absorb these costs!
- When states can't cover the difference, it will undermine seniors' access to long-term care like nursing homes or home and community-based services and supports.
- Medicaid pays 60 percent of long-term care—more than any other source!
- 2/3 of all Medicaid spending in Wisconsin is on older adults and people with disabilities. Optional Home and community-based services such as Family Care and IRIS are especially vulnerable to funding cuts, as current federal Medicaid law mandates coverage for care institutional facilities, but less expensive community-based services remain optional.
- The cuts in the Trump budget (AHCA) could result in higher Medicaid costs and reduced care, including co-pays and premiums for consumers, waiting lists for services.
- We must preserve Medicaid's safety net guarantee in order to keep older adults healthy and living safely in their homes and communities!

Medicare Is Complicated, so Save Our SHIPs!

- The President's Budget proposes to eliminate the federal State Health Insurance Assistance program (SHIP). In every state, SHIPs provides one-on-one assistance and counseling to Medicare beneficiaries whose complex needs require more help than is provided by 1-800-Medicare or medicare.gov.
- Wisconsin SHIP counselors and volunteers responded to over 86,000 customer contacts last year.
- SHIPs rely heavily on highly-trained volunteers and play a critical role in ensuring that older adults and people with disabilities make informed decisions about their Medicare coverage and navigate the complicated and shifting landscape of Medicare choices.

Flexible Block Grants Drive Funding Where It's Needed

- Three major grant programs would be eliminated by the Trump Administration. All are designed to send federal dollars to states or localities to invest in those communities, to shore up underfunded human service or infrastructure efforts and to provide resources unavailable elsewhere—and allow communities flexibility to decide what is needed most! Here are just a few ways this bedrock federal funding is used for aging services...
 - The *Social Services Block Grant*, is used by many states to run their Adult Protective Services efforts—without this funding stream, vulnerable older adults will be at greater risk of abuse.
 - The *Community Services Block Grant*, also proposed for elimination, helps local Older Americans Act programs run by Area Agencies on Aging and providers provide more people with meals, rides to the doctor and help living independently.
 - The *Community Development Block Grant*, works to ensure decent affordable housing, to provide services to the most vulnerable in our community. Some localities use this funding to supplement their existing home-delivered meals programs.
- In Wisconsin, these funds are used to support a variety of community programs serving older adults and other community members – see the following links for more information:
 - Social Services Block Grant - <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/opib/ssbgplanfy17-0.pdf>
 - Community Services Block Grant - <https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/files/w2/csbg/csbg-state-annual-report2014.pdf>
 - Community Development Block Grant - <http://www.doa.state.wi.us/Divisions/Housing/CDBG-Housing>
- **The President's budget does not cut the core Older Americans Act programs** (one bright spot!) but if these lesser-known but still important block grants are eliminated, significant local aging resources will dry up. Older Americans Act can't absorb that demand and even seniors currently getting meals or in-home help could lose out.

Workforce, Volunteer Programs Especially Needed as America Ages

- The *Senior Community Service Employment Program* (Title V of the Older Americans Act), would also be eliminated in the Trump budget. Losing this program—the only federal job training program focused on the unique needs of older workers—would immediately affect the approximately 70,000 age 55+ workers who receive skills training, job placement help and subsidized community service jobs annually, including 1,100 older workers right here in Wisconsin.
- Finally, the budget eliminates the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), an independent agency which runs the long-standing, popular *Senior Corps* programs, specifically Foster Grandparents, Senior Companions and RSVP. Senior Corps is the only national program able to place large numbers of senior volunteers in high-quality volunteer positions, generating 96 million hours of service to communities. Wisconsin's 7,700 Senior Corps volunteers and the service they provide to 720 local organizations will all be lost if these programs are zeroed out in the federal budget.

For more information, contact the Greater Wisconsin Agency on Aging Resources www.gwaar.org, 608.243.5670 or the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging (n4a) in Washington, DC: www.n4a.org, 202.872.0888.