

# Area Agencies on Aging Association of Michigan

## Aging Advocates - Keep Up the Pressure! Tell Congress Exactly How Sequestration Hurts Older Adults & Caregivers in Your Community

Thanks to those of you who have written 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 concerned about sequestration.

***Please keep up the noise! Public engagement, and the media attention it garners, is critical to affecting if and how lawmakers confront the fiscal cliff 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!

Read on for details.

### **Background:**

Washington D.C. may seem far away, but decisions made in the nation's capitol are now being felt close to home. The federal sequester – part of the 2011 grand plan to restore solvency to the federal budget – is now a reality. Cuts in senior meals and in-home services have hit local communities across the state, and the aging network has slashed programs one more time, despite more phone calls from seniors and caregivers asking for help. The bottom line for Michigan is \$2.7 million cut from the Office of Services to the Aging, 70% of that from senior meals. While the cuts are theoretically across-the-board, the percentages are different for each program because of the complexities of the funding formulas used. The federal cuts are on top of \$9.3 million in state funding cuts made during Michigan's Great Recession, most of which have not been restored.

As if this isn't enough, even more federal cuts are looming on the horizon. The '13 cuts are just the first in a ten-year cutting game plan. FY 2014 cuts are potentially just around the corner with the

fiscal year starting October 1, 2013.

The time is NOW. What Congress and the White House do in the next few weeks and months will be key in deciding whether more cuts will hit vulnerable adults and caregivers. While the fiscal issues are large and complex, it is critical that aging advocates engage in this national conversation, especially to speak for the frail, vulnerable older adults and overworked caregivers you serve.

Seniors will be hurt by the 2<sup>nd</sup> round of sequester cuts to the Older Americans Act and other programs, but also by cuts to Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security.

### **Action Steps to Take:**

**STEP 1 for Senior Advocates:** Use the statistics below to describe the impact of losses in Michigan to date.

#### 6.12% Cuts to Older Americans Act Programs in Michigan

Congregate meals (served at senior centers, churches, etc.)	\$894,842 (6.92%)
Home delivered meals (meals-on-wheels)	\$414,603 (6.32%)
Nutrition Subsidy (expands congregate and home delivered meal funding)	\$526,657 (7.82%)
Supportive services (personal care, homemaking, supports coordination, transportation, information & assistance, etc.)	\$422,534 (3.81%)
Caregiver supports (in-home respite, adult day care)	\$313,879 (6.77%)
Preventive health (controls diabetes & other chronic diseases, prevents falls, etc.)	\$42,711 (6.59%)
Long Term Care Ombudsman (advocates for facility residents)	\$34,126 (7.63%)

*Source: Michigan Office of Services to the Aging*

**STEP 1 for Service Providers: Sequestration Data Collection and Calculation.** Document the cuts in federal programs you administer, along with the impact on clients.

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 effect of slashing your federal funding sources.

**STEP 2: Assemble Your Messages Into A Letter.** Let them know who you are, then get right to the point: *"The 2013 sequester struck a significant blow 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 this sequester hurt older adults and caregivers. Here's how...[insert your data messages]"* End by asking them what their plan is for restoring funds AND for averting this dangerous budgetary gimmick in the future.

*Add-On: **The health and well-being of older adults may also be affected by cuts to Medicare, Medicaid or even Social Security.*** As you see fit, raise those concerns as well. If you choose to focus solely on sequestration and/or a balanced approach, that's fine too.

**STEP 3: Communicate your message to all of your federal Representatives and Senators!** Do not send letters to Washington, D.C., rather, make a phone call or send emails & faxes. Or call their district office. Contact information is available in your phone book, from the public library, or at: [www.senate.gov](http://www.senate.gov) and [www.house.gov](http://www.house.gov).

**3) If you can, Tweet your Members of Congress.** Weave stats on sequestration into the tweet and be sure to address it to the Member so that their staff see the citation.

**STEP 4: Ask others to do the same! Urge colleagues, advisory board members, volunteers and clients to send their own letters and emails to Congress.**

*This advocacy alert adapted from the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging.*

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