

COALITION *for* HEALTH FUNDING

Emily J. Holubowich, MPP, Executive Director

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

September 14, 2012

Contact: Emily Holubowich

Voice: 202.484.1100

E-mail: eholubowich@dc-crd.com

OMB AFFIRMS SEQUESTRATION IS BAD FOR AMERICA'S HEALTH

Public health community continues push for balanced approach to deficit reduction that avoids additional cuts.

The Office and Management and Budget (OMB) report on the implementation of sequestration sheds some light on the impact of the forthcoming cuts. The report affirms that across-the-board cuts of 8.2 percent mandated by the bipartisan Budget Control Act will put Americans' health and safety at great risk. These severe cuts—on top of cuts public health and other domestic programs have already sustained since fiscal year 2010—will devastate the core programs and services Americans rely on to keep them healthy, safe, and secure. That's why the Coalition for Health Funding strongly urges Congress to act now in finding a meaningful, balanced approach to deficit reduction that does not rely on further cuts to nondefense discretionary (NDD) programs such as public health.

Nondefense discretionary programs are a small and declining share of the federal budget and our overall economy—already reduced to levels not seen since President Eisenhower held office. These programs are not the drivers of the debt. In fact, completely eliminating all these programs and services would not balance the budget. And yet, to date these programs have borne the brunt of responsibility for deficit reduction.

The public health community is feeling the effects of the unbalanced approach. Since 2010, 55,000 state and local public health professionals have been laid off—those who monitor and respond to outbreaks such as West Nile virus and help communities prepare for and recover from natural disasters such as Hurricane Isaac. Scientists are losing important ground as they wonder whether they'll be able to keep their labs and research centers open. Students seeking health care, public health, and research careers are turned away for a lack of advanced training opportunities. Americans with insurance can't find primary health care providers, especially in rural areas. And returning service members with the invisible wounds of war suffer in silence as the mental health care system buckles under the weight of overwhelming demand. The OMB report just confirms what we've known to be true: sequestration will be the knockout punch to public health.

"Policymakers on both sides of the aisle agree that the sequester is unacceptable. They know what they need to do to fix it. They just haven't yet mustered the political will to do it," said Emily Holubowich, Executive Director of the Coalition for Health Funding. "OMB's report affirms the time to act is now. Only a balanced approach can avoid sequestration and restore fiscal stability. Anything less will do more harm than good."

The Coalition for Health Funding is a nonprofit alliance working to preserve public health investments in the interest of all Americans. Our member organizations together represent more than 100 million patients, health care providers, public health professionals, and scientists.

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