New Report Indicates Imminent National Crisis in Ability of Aging Community to Provide Critical Services Required for Frail Elderly

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Washington, DC – The National Association of Area Agencies on Aging (n4a) today released a report entitled “Squeezing Seniors: Aging Community Fears National Crisis As a Result of Federal Budget Cuts.” The report releases findings from an October 2013 n4a survey that sampled local Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs) in nine states on the effects of stagnant and reduced federal funding, including sequestration, on community aging programs and services partially federally funded via the Older Americans Act (OAA), which provides federal funding to states and communities for a range of community-based aging programs and services for older Americans at risk of losing their independence.

Nearly 85 percent of respondents stated that they will not be able to provide sufficient aging services if federal cuts including sequestration continue. As a result of years of stagnant funding followed by the sharp cuts under sequestration, virtually all AAA leaders polled were concerned or very concerned about the ability of seniors in their community to be able to remain living independently without costly institutional care.

A majority (60 percent) of respondents were able to partially offset the FY 2013 budget cuts, but three-quarters of those agency leaders indicated they would not be able to repeat that gap-filling this year. This untenable funding situation has led to direct cuts in many local aging programs. The n4a survey found that nearly three-quarters of AAAs indicated they were forced to reduce the number of home-delivered and congregate meals served. Half had reduced transportation services that help older adults with mobility challenges to get a ride to a doctor’s appointment, pharmacy, grocery store or other essential destinations. And more than a third cut back on support services available to family caregivers of older adults. More than half of AAAs surveyed reported reduced staffing levels or hours, as well.

“Unfortunately, we found what we feared: Aging Network leaders are deeply concerned about their ability to meet their communities’ demands for critical senior services. Sadly, the problem will only grow deeper and more painful if federal budget cuts like sequestration continue,” said n4a CEO Sandy Markwood.

The aging population currently comprises more than 18 percent of the population and is growing rapidly; seniors age 60+ are projected to make up 22.5 percent of the U.S. population by 2020. OAA services provide a critical safety net to millions of older Americans. OAA funding is allocated locally to AAAs, which then develop, fund and coordinate delivery of supportive services to seniors every day.
The states selected to participate in the national sample were Alabama, Arizona, Florida, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, South Carolina, Vermont and Washington. Combined, these states have 86 AAAs providing a wide range of aging and caregiver services in their respective communities. Each AAA completed a twelve-question survey that asked respondents to provide insight on the effect of federal funding cuts on their AAA’s ability to meet demand for services in the community.

The staggering figures in the report confirm that older adults are at serious risk from federal budget cuts and illustrate that the current economic and budget crises have made it increasingly difficult for AAAs to even maintain existing services—let alone expand services for a growing aging population. Even before sequestration, stagnant federal investment prevented programs from growing along with the aging population. Now the poor economy has created increased demand for services as families struggle to support and care for older relatives, and as more older adults struggle to make ends meet.

“It is critical that Congress addresses and corrects the impending aging services catastrophe by investing in the Older Americans Act. It makes no sense to cut a program that saves federal dollars in the long run by ensuring that older adults can age with dignity and independence in their own homes and communities rather than in a more costly institutional setting,” said Markwood.

To view the report in its entirety, visit www.n4a.org/advocacy/.

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The National Association of Area Agencies on Aging (n4a) is the leading voice on aging issues for Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs) across the country and a champion for Title VI Native American aging programs in our nation’s capital. n4a’s primary mission is to build the capacity of its members to help older adults and people with disabilities live with dignity and independence in their homes and communities for as long as possible (www.n4a.org / www.facebook.com/n4aACTION).