

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
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June 7, 2012

The Honorable Kathleen Sebelius
Secretary
Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Secretary Sebelius:

I am concerned about impending automatic budget cuts mandated by the Budget Control Act of 2011. Accordingly, I request that the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) provide Congress a detailed account of how these cuts will be applied and the impact they will have on medical research and development, access to new medical treatments, and other health and well-being programs within the Department's purview.

As you know, unless the Budget Control Act is repealed or amended, federal agencies dedicated to research, health, and community development face a 7.8% cut in their budgets on January 1, 2013. The cuts will be draconian and devastating for millions of Americans, including our nation's most vulnerable populations: seniors, children, and Americans with disabilities.

HHS has some flexibility to determine how the cuts are applied through funding transfers, reprogramming, personnel decisions, and other actions. Because the health and well-being of every American could be impacted by these cuts, I ask the Department to describe how it will handle these mandatory cuts and what their impact will be on the programs within its jurisdiction.

These deep reductions could stop vital, life-saving research in its tracks. New drugs and therapies could go undiscovered. High-paying, quality jobs at universities and labs nationwide could be lost. U.S. leadership in biomedical research will no longer be assured, as nations like China and India double down on their investments in research and development while our country scales back.

According to a recent report released by Research!America, the cuts translate into a \$3.6 billion loss for medical research in 2013 alone. The National Institutes of Health (NIH) stands to lose \$2.4 billion, an amount equal to half of the entire budget of the National

Cancer Institute. Research into diseases such as Alzheimer's, autism, childhood leukemia, and cerebral palsy could be put on hold for lack of funding, just as scientists are truly beginning to understand these diseases and reach breakthrough discoveries. Cutting off research funding now would be like pulling the plug on the space exploration budget, just days before a scheduled take-off to the moon.

Cuts of this magnitude threaten to slow not only drug discovery but also drug approval times. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA), the sole agency responsible for ensuring the safety of our food supply, drugs, and medical devices, faces the prospect of a \$200 million budget cut. This cut equates to more than the agency's entire budget for reviewing the safety of medical device applications prior to them entering the market. Already, the agency and its safety reviewers face the enormous task of protecting the public from tainted food, ensuring that medications do what their labels claim, and approving new drugs and devices so patients can benefit from them. Requiring the agency to make these additional cuts threatens this critical work.

In addition, middle-class and low-income families could feel the immediate impact of these cuts. Financial assistance that helps low-income families heat their homes in the winter could take another [yet] even though its funding has already been slashed, leaving millions of Americans in the cold. Community Services Block Grants, which provide employment, education and housing to low-income and disabled Americans, are on the chopping block. Student loans and vocational rehabilitation funding could shrink.

Even our seniors are not shielded from the impact of these cuts. Their doctors face a cut in Medicare payments of \$11 billion in 2013 alone, making it increasingly harder for doctors to treat Medicare patients, let alone to see new ones.

Every family is one doctor's visit away from needing the promise of NIH research. Every senior deserves to have access to medical care from the doctor of their choice. Every parent wants to know that the food they serve their children at the dinner table is safe.

I appreciate your attention to this matter and request that HHS provide an explanation of the impact of sequestration no later than June 30, 2012. I believe Congress and the American public would benefit from a detailed understanding of the harm these mandatory cuts pose to vital health programs upon which millions of Americans around the nation rely. If you have any questions, please have a member of your staff contact Sara Schaumburg in my office at sara.schaumburg@mail.house.gov or 202-225-2836.

Sincerely,



Edward J. Markey
Member of Congress