



## Sweating the Sequester — Groups Express Alarm About Health Cuts

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A coalition whose members would be affected by automatic cuts in non-defense discretionary spending under the budget control law sent a letter Thursday to members of Congress warning that the reductions would be “devastating” to the nation.

The law calls for automatic cuts in defense spending and in other types of federal discretionary spending, including funding of agencies such as the National Institutes of Health, the Food and Drug Administration, and other health-related federal offices.

Sixty-three pages of the 64-page letter list the 3,000 groups that signed it, hundreds of them health organizations.

The letter was circulated by the Coalition for Health Funding, whose spokeswoman Emily Holubowich said that non-defense discretionary spending is a “small and shrinking share of our federal budget and economy.” The letter said that “NDD” spending in 2011 made up 4.3 percent of the Gross Domestic Product. Under the budget control law (PL 112-25), that type of spending will fall to 2.5 percent of GDP in 2021, the lowest level in at least 50 years.

“NDD programs are core functions government provides for the benefit of all, including medical and scientific research; education and job training; infrastructure; public safety and law enforcement; public health, weather monitoring and environmental protection; natural and cultural resources; housing and social services; and international relations,” the letter said.

“We strongly urge a balanced approach to deficit reduction that does not include further cuts to NDD programs.”

Congress must adopt another approach to deficit reduction by January 1 to head off the automatic cuts, known as the sequester.

Separately, Health and Human Services Assistant Secretary for Financial Resources Ellen G. Murray said in a June 29 letter to Rep. Edward J. Markey, D-Mass., that “automatic sequestration would reduce non-defense discretionary programs by 7.8 percent on January 2, 2013, which would be applied to most HHS accounts.” Murray was citing a Congressional Budget Office estimate.

She said the cuts would have “profound consequences.” According to Murray, “the National Institutes of Health could potentially eliminate 2,300 new and competing research project grants, with nearly 300 fewer grants issued by the National Cancer Institute.”

She added that “approximately 12,150 fewer patients would receive benefits from our AIDS Drug Assistance Program” and about “169,000 fewer individuals would be admitted to substance abuse treatment programs.” The cuts also would harm efforts to control health care fraud, she said.