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Amida Care Strongly Opposes Devastating Health Care Cuts in President Trump’s Budget

New York, N.Y. (May 25, 2017)—Amida Care believes that President Trump’s fiscal year 2018 budget blatantly jeopardizes the health of the nation, particularly those who rely on affordable health care and safety-net programs to get and stay healthy. After repeated promises on the campaign trail that he would not cut Medicaid, President Trump has proposed making \$627 billion cuts to Medicaid over the next 10 years by capping this essential program. The budget also includes severe cuts to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Institutes of Health, Ryan White HIV/AIDS Program, and other federal HIV initiatives for minorities and the country’s most vulnerable populations. These deep cuts don’t just endanger the progress that AIDS advocates have made over the last three decades; they threaten the lives of millions of Americans who will face extraordinary hurdles in accessing health care under this draconian budget.

“The unprecedented health care and safety net cuts outlined in President Trump’s budget represent a cruel and callous attack on millions of hard-working Americans,” said Doug Wirth, President and CEO of Amida Care. “Funding for health care is not just a number on a balance sheet – for many people, it’s a matter of life and death. These ruthless cuts will reverse our hard-earned progress in the fight against AIDS. It harkens back to the years of inaction under the Reagan administration that fueled the growth of the AIDS epidemic– an epidemic that has been far too costly in American lives and taxpayer dollars.”

While on the surface these cuts may seem to save taxpayers money in the short term, cuts to health care will incur substantial costs in the long term and negate any immediate cost-savings. Without access to preventive care, more and more people will require expensive hospitalizations and in-patient services. Just because people don’t have coverage, it doesn’t mean they don’t get sick – it just means that taxpayers will be shouldering the cost of their hospital visits, which is a deeply troubling and ultimately a losing strategy.

The proposed cuts to Medicaid change it from an entitlement to a state-based per-capita grant program. Once the cap is met, states would be forced to either come up with more money or cut services. And unlike our current Medicaid system, a per-capita grant program can’t be scaled flexibly to address changing health care needs during crises like natural disasters, public health emergencies, or economic downturns. This change does not solve the problem of the cost of medical care; it pushes the problem downstream.

The cuts to Medicaid coupled with cuts to the Ryan White HIV/AIDS Program would mean that even working people living with HIV could struggle to stay in treatment. The AIDS Drug Assistance Program (ADAP) in Ryan White helps middle class people living with HIV afford health insurance and pay for medications that keep them healthy and virally suppressed. Cutting Medicaid and Ryan White at the same time means that ADAP will not be able to sustain the number of people living with HIV who will need assistance. A similar situation occurred following the recent recession when the demand for ADAP services was so great that waiting lists for the program emerged in 13 states including Ohio and Florida. Thousands of people living with HIV were forced to wait for treatment.

“At Amida Care, we take pride in ensuring that underserved communities have access to health care, which results in better health outcomes and significant cost savings for taxpayers,” added Wirth. “This budget not only fails to address the needs of underserved populations around the country, but it also threatens to exacerbate the challenges they face by eliminating the safety-net programs that keep them afloat. President Trump has made it abundantly clear that his wealthy peers are his priority – not the everyday American.”

Slashing nearly \$1 billion in health care spending is not the answer. The combined cuts to Medicaid and safety net programs in the President’s budget proposal would be devastating. They decrease access to health care for working class and low-income Americans and damage the critical programs that help people stay in their homes, keep food on the table, and avoid falling into a ceaseless cycle of poverty. Removing these supports would exacerbate poor health outcomes.

As a next step, Congress will make its independent judgments in crafting the fiscal year 2018 budget; Amida Care urges Congress to reject the draconian cuts proposed by President Trump. However, doing so is not sufficient to provide needed investments in critical non-defense programs. Congress cannot ignore the return of reduced, sequestered spending caps for fiscal year 2018. These restrictive caps must be raised for non-defense discretionary programs like Medicaid and the Ryan White HIV/AIDS Program to be adequately funded in fiscal year 2018. Equally critical, relief from the tight caps must be even-handed; parity must be maintained by providing the same relief from the sequestered caps to defense and non-defense programs alike. A bipartisan budget deal like those that provided relief from the sequestered caps and maintained parity for fiscal years 2014, 2015, 2016, and 2017 must be achieved for 2018.

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