An HIV/AIDS advocate’s guide to the deficit reduction process

Prepared by the HIV Health Care Access Working Group & the AIDS Budget and Appropriations Coalition

Updated November 2011
Background: What is deficit reduction?

Right now, the federal government spends more money than it brings in through revenue.

The difference in spending and revenue has resulted in a deficit now over $14 trillion.

Congress and the President have agreed to reduce this deficit (Budget Control Act).
Background:
How could deficit reduction affect HIV/AIDS programs?

Deficit reduction will mean reduced spending on federal programs

A fair, balanced approach must include revenue increases

Reducing the deficit solely through spending cuts could harm essential health programs

| Ryan White Program | Prevention Funding | Entitlement Programs (Medicaid & Medicare) |
Background: The Budget Control Act of 2011*

Step 1 (complete)
- Debt ceiling increased (meaning, Congress allowed the U.S. to continue paying its bills)
- Immediate spending cuts for defense and non-defense discretionary programs
- Medicare, Medicaid, Social Security, and certain other low-income entitlement programs not cut for now (“exempted” programs)

* Sept. 8th—President Obama added payment for the Jobs Bill to the equation

Step 2
- Bipartisan joint “super committee” to recommend additional $1.2 - $1.5 trillion in reductions
- Super committee can recommend changes to taxes (revenue), entitlement programs, and discretionary spending
- **Automatic** spending cuts (or a combination of super committee changes and automatic cuts) if deficit reduction target not met by December 2011 deadline (8% defense and 4% non-defense)
- Automatic spending cuts would not affect Medicaid, Social Security and other entitlement programs (Medicare cuts are limited)

* Sept. 8th—President Obama added payment for the Jobs Bill to the equation
Upcoming dates & deadlines for deficit reduction actions …

**Nov. 23rd**
Super committee must submit proposal to Congress and President

**Dec. 23rd**
Senate and House must vote on legislation (no amendments allowed)
Background:
The 12 “super committee” members

3 Senate Democrats
*Co-chair
- Patty Murray* (WA)
- Max Baucus (MT)
- John Kerry (MA)

3 Senate Republicans
- John Kyl (AZ)
- Pat Toomey (PA)
- Rob Portman (OH)

3 House Republicans
*Co-chair
- Jeb Hensarling* (TX-5th)
- Dave Camp (MI-4th)
- Fred Upton (MI-6th)

3 House Democrats
- James Clyburn (SC-6th)
- Xavier Becerra (CA-31st)
- Chris Van Hollen (MD-8th)
What you can do:
Contact your Representative & 2 Senators

If you have a Representative or Senator on the super committee, take advantage of this unique opportunity to make your voice heard.

If your members of Congress are not on the super-committee, tell them to vote only for a balanced deficit reduction plan that will preserve key health programs and includes revenue increases.
# Messaging: The HIV community’s deficit reduction priorities

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Deficit reduction must include revenue increases</th>
<th>• A fair and balanced approach is necessary—it can’t be all cuts</th>
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<tr>
<td>Protect vulnerable populations and funding for health and HIV programs</td>
<td>• Cuts to these programs mean higher rates of infection, worse health outcomes, and higher health care costs in the long run</td>
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| Protect Medicaid and Medicare | • They provide health care for millions of Americans, including people living with HIV/AIDS  
• Cutting federal spending on Medicaid just shifts costs to states and consumers |
| Continue to fund health care reforms that will improve quality and cost-effectiveness in delivery of care | • Cuts to reform programs are a lost opportunity to improve care and lower costs |
Contact your members of Congress!

Follow these simple steps to learn how to find your Congress members’ contact information . . .
Step 1:
Identify your Senators and Representative

To begin:
Go to Congress.org
Enter your ZIP code
Step 1: Identify your Senators and Representative

Next: If necessary, enter your street address
Step 2: Find your members’ contact information

Next: Click each member’s name to access their contact info
Step 2: Find your members’ district office(s)

Find contact info for either office under the “Contact” tab.
Step 3:  
If you want to schedule a meeting

- Identify yourself as a constituent
- Ask to speak to the scheduler

- The office might ask you to send a written request for a meeting
  - If so, you can mail or fax in a short letter

- Call again the week of the meeting to confirm that you’ll be coming
  - If you’re bringing other people, tell the office how many are coming
Planning your meeting or call: Tips for getting you point across

Tell your story
- Get your member’s attention by making it personal
- Describe why the issues are important to you as a person

“The Ask”
- Tell your member in simple terms what action you want her to take (support this, oppose that)
- End with “Can I count on your support on these issues?”

Keep it short
- Stick to the topic
- Acknowledge that your member and his or her staff are busy, and thank them for their time
One last thing:
Follow up

After your meeting or call, send a thank-you letter to your member or the staff person you spoke to:

- Thank him/her for taking time to talk with you
- Express your hope that the member will support programs that serve people living with HIV/AIDS throughout the deficit reduction process
- Provide your contact information in case the member or staff person has any additional questions
Other advocacy opportunities

- Write (email/fax) to your members of Congress & the super committee
- Submit a letter to the editor @ your local or state newspaper
- Educate other constituents at town hall meetings, health fairs, or other events

Use the HIV community’s 4 deficit reduction principles as talking points
No Time? E-MAIL the Super-Committee Directly

The following is a template letter that can be sent to the Super Committee via their website at http://www.deficitreduction.gov/public/index.cfm/contact.

Feel free to add your story to the end of the template message to make it even more effective. You can start off by saying “These issues are important to me and my community because…”

Message:

I am writing as a member of the HIV/AIDS community. As the Joint Select Committee considers options for deficit reduction, it is important that you keep in mind the impact of your decisions on the over one million people living with HIV and AIDS in the US. As you are no doubt aware, federal support for HIV prevention, care and treatment, and essential support services is critical to protecting both individual and public health outcomes related to HIV and AIDS. I urge you to support the HIV/AIDS community’s priorities throughout the deficit reduction process:

(1) Deficit reduction must be fair and balanced, and must include raising revenues.

(2) Any approach to deficit reduction must protect vulnerable populations and maintain the federal commitment to the fight against HIV/AIDS through ongoing funding of essential prevention, care and treatment, research, housing, and support services.

(3) It is essential to preserve the federal commitment to the Medicaid and Medicare programs.

(4) We oppose deficit reduction strategies that would jeopardize health care reforms already underway.

As someone whose life has been affected by HIV, these priorities are extremely important to me.

Thank you!
No time? Tweet about it!

A fair & balanced approach to #deficit reduction includes revenue increases [http://tiny.cc/ddy5o](http://tiny.cc/ddy5o) #SuperCommittee

Tell the #SuperCommittee to support a fair & balanced approach to #deficit reduction [http://tiny.cc/9u906](http://tiny.cc/9u906)

#Medicaid is the largest source of HIV/AIDS care and treatment in the US, covering almost half of people in care [http://tiny.cc/j1u9i](http://tiny.cc/j1u9i)

Shifting #Medicaid costs to states will harm access to HIV care and prevention [http://tiny.cc/l8aeu](http://tiny.cc/l8aeu) #deficit #SuperCommittee

Protect #Medicaid for people living with HIV/AIDS! [http://tinyurl.com/6lx84vl](http://tinyurl.com/6lx84vl)
Additional resources

Families USA is a great source of information and advocacy tips & alerts. They have a special section all about the deficit reduction super committee!

AIDS United posts HIV-specific alerts and other advocacy opportunities, including actions related to deficit reduction. Check out their weekly policy updates for the latest info.

The Treatment Access Expansion Project website hosts a library of formal HIV health policy comment letters that are helpful when you’re looking for lots of detail.

The deficit reduction super committee (formally called the “Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction”) recently launched a website that includes a link to send comments directly to the committee.
Questions or feedback from your advocacy activities? Contact us!

Let us know how your advocacy is going! Report-backs from grassroots advocates after in-district meetings and phone calls to member offices help to guide advocacy in Washington. And we’re happy to answer questions, too!

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<th>Jessica Terlikowski</th>
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