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## **YVEDDI dealing with 'sequester' cuts**

by Taylor Pardue

Staff Reporter

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YVEDDI's senior meal program is being affected by the national sequester cuts. Although the program is currently able to meet its obligations officials are skeptical as to how long they can maintain the same level of care.

The sequester is posed to continue as YVEDDI braces for quarterly cuts. The organization, particularly the Meals on Wheels program, is slated to receive \$6,000 of additional cuts in the first quarter of the 2013-14 fiscal year. Those numbers come on top of \$4,000 in cuts that have already been imposed.

According to an op-ed by Allison Brown - Aging Program Planner for the Piedmont Triad Regional Council, Yadkin County will be subject to the cuts between July 1 and September 30 of 2013. This is in addition to nearly \$4,000 in cuts made in the 2012-13 fiscal year.

Brenda Holbrook, Senior Enrichment Program Director for YVEDDI, told The Tribune that cuts have been minimized so far by fundraisers. Locals are offering donations and thinking up new ways to raise money like walk-a-thons, while drivers who deliver meals are refusing to turn in reimbursement forms for their mileage, according to Holbrook.

The expense refusals save YVEDDI \$0.50 per mile, something Holbrook says the drivers are more than willing to do in order to keep meals flowing to the needy.

Holbrook said it was particularly hard on the drivers to see these sequester cuts because they saw firsthand the need in the community and knew the elderly that will be affected on a first name basis.

As of June 19 no seniors have had to be placed on a waiting list or be turned away hungry, but that could change with further cuts. Holbrook said roughly 160 people are currently served with an average of three to four new referrals each week.

Some help has been given to help YVEDDI make it through the cuts.

The US Department of Agriculture has increased its reimbursement per meal. Under the Nutrition Services Incentive Program the USDA previously reimbursed YVEDDI \$0.60 for each meal YVEDDI provided. The USDA had planned to increase that amount to \$0.85 per meal, but later had to lower it to \$0.75.

"This is not as high as the \$0.85, however, it is a 25 percent increase over the current amount," said Blair Barton-Percival, director of the Piedmont Triad

Regional Council. "This increase is expected to be in place for the foreseeable future."

Holbrook said the USDA had been reimbursing YVEDDI at \$0.60 per meal for the 16 years she has been with the organization.

Budget makers are having to spend additional time redoing next year's budget to reflect the new \$0.75 rate, even as the end of the 2012-13 fiscal year nears its end.

The fiscal year ends June 30.

Holbrook said further cuts were coming, but the exact amount had not been determined.

YVEDDI is taking their fears and frustrations statewide. Yadkin County senior centers are doing paper plate protests, with seniors writing messages like "don't empty my plate!"

The messages are written on the plates and then the entire plate collection is mailed to local legislators serving in Raleigh.

Jonesville's Yadkin Valley center did their plate protest Thursday morning and are pictured in this article. East Bend Senior Center and Yadkinville Senior Center also did plate protests to advocate for the end of the sequester on nutrition services for senior citizens.

Holbrook is hoping to do another plate protest, this time using the plates to form the word "hungry" and photograph it from above. The photo will be taken inside YVEDDI's Boonville location with seniors standing around the plates.

Surry County is not immune to the cuts either. According to Allison Brown and Adrienne Calhoun - also of the Piedmont Triad Regional Center - agencies in Surry County that receive HCCBG funding had to cut \$7,837 by July 1, \$4,642 of which comes from meal programs. The results could be a loss of 1,522 meals for seniors.

The sequester is a national problem, not just affecting Yadkin and Surry. Senior centers across the country are cutting programs and staffing to cope with their new budget constraints.

According to a press release from Lisa Money of the Yadkin Valley center: over 70 percent of senior centers are establishing or adding to existing waiting lists, 40 percent are reducing the number of days they deliver meals, 50 percent are reducing the number of seniors being served, 40 percent are cutting staff positions, and 70 percent are cutting the number of meals served.

One in six centers are closing congregate sites or home delivered meal programs, according to Money's release.

Congregate sites is a central location where those who can get around well enough go to pick up their own meals, like the senior centers in Yadkin County.

Holbrook said for now cuts are heavier on the congregate sites and less toward the home-bound deliveries. That may change if the sequester continues to impact senior nutrition efforts.

Those interested in donating should contact Brenda Holbrook at 336-367-3522 or Kathy Chaffin, Yadkin Programs Specialist for YVEDDI, at YVEDDI's main line 336-367-7251.

Those interested in joining the seniors in their urging of local representatives and looking for contact information for elected officials, please call the senior center nearest you: East Bend at 336-699-5100, Yadkin County (Yadkinville) at 336-679-3596, and Yadkin Valley (Jonesville) at 336-526-1087.

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