

Massive Federal Budget Plan Passes Congress, Heads to Bush

News Feature By Bob Curley

An omnibus federal budget for FY2008 has been passed by the U.S. Senate and House and is headed for the president's desk; the bill includes funding for addiction treatment and prevention programs as part of \$555 billion in appropriations.

The consensus among addiction-field advocates seems to indicate that treatment, prevention and research programs fared reasonably well in another difficult budget year, despite some significant cuts in certain programs.

President Bush appears likely to sign the bill -- which consolidates a dozen federal spending measures -- into law; the measure includes \$70 billion in funding for the war in Iraq. It also includes a 1.747-percent across-the-board spending cut in the Labor/HHS/Education bill, which includes the bulk of federal addiction treatment, prevention, and research spending.

The budget bill calls for essentially flat spending on the keystone, \$1.758-billion Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment (SAPT) block grant, which will increase just \$137,000 over FY2007 spending levels. The addiction block grant fared relatively well compared to its sister programs for mental health, which all received cuts from federal budgetmakers.

The Center for Substance Abuse Treatment (CSAT) budget also will remain roughly the same in 2008, rising just \$895,000 to \$52.05 million in FY08. Within CSAT, President Bush's Access to Recovery treatment-voucher program was funded in line with the administration's budget request -- \$98 million -- with \$25 million set aside for methamphetamine treatment. Funding was increased relative to 2007 for CSAT's Pregnant and Parenting Women Program (\$12 million in FY08), while the Screening and Brief Intervention and Referral to Treatment program was level funded at \$29.6 million.

The Center for Substance Abuse Prevention's (CSAP) budget for next year will be \$194.12 million, up \$1.2 million from 2007 and \$37.6 million more than requested by the Bush administration. That includes \$5.5 million for activities related

to the Sober Truth on Preventing Underage Drinking (STOP) initiative, including \$1 million for an Ad Council media campaign, \$4 million for community grants, and \$500,000 to support the Intergovernmental Coordinating Committee on Underage Drinking. The STOP Act had authorized up to \$18 million for these programs.

Safe and Drug Free Schools Withers; NIDA Research Cut

Funding for the Department of Education's Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities program continues to decline: the state grants portion of the program will be funded at \$294.75 million in FY08, down \$51.7 million from 2007. The Education budget also includes \$10.8 million for student drug testing.

For the first time in recent memory, the budget of the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) will decline under the 2008 federal spending plan; lawmakers funded the agency at just over \$1 billion, cutting drug research spending \$1.252 million compared to FY07. The budget for the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism crept up slightly, to \$436.259 million, an increase of \$674,000.

The omnibus spending package also included the budget for the U.S. Department of Justice, including \$15.2 million for drug courts and \$9.4 million for the Residential Substance Abuse Treatment program (which serves inmates with addiction problems). The drug-court funding represents a \$5.328-million increase over FY07.

The Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grant Program, a formula grant to states that can be used for treatment as well as antidrug law-enforcement activities, was slashed to \$170 million, a cut of \$380 million.

The Justice Department budget also included about \$7 million for a prescription-drug monitoring program for states.

Elsewhere, the budget plan calls for cutting funding for the Office of National Drug Control Policy's (ONDCP) national

antidrug media campaign -- which lawmakers called ineffective -- from \$99 million to \$60 million, far below the administration's \$130-million request. The ONDCP-administered Drug Free Communities grant program received \$90 million, the same as last year.

The budget plan also clears the District of Columbia to spend local funds on needle exchange programs, despite strong opposition from the White House, but continues to bar city officials from using federal money for clean-needle programs. (A ban on D.C.'s implementation of a voter-approved medical-marijuana program also remains intact in the FY08 budget.)

Did you know that 6 out of 10 people suffering from substance abuse problems also suffer from mental conditions like depression? Research has long documented that people suffering from depression try to self-medicate themselves through alcohol and other drugs. Typically, many of these individuals fail to remain clean and sober after rehabilitation because their underlying medical problem is not addressed and the cycle of self-medication begins again.

Remember: If you have substance abuse issues, there is a 60 percent chance that you are also suffering from an underlying mental condition like depression.

Increase your chances of rehabilitation. Be sure to ask your doctor or other mental health professionals about depression as it relates to substance abuse issues.

Source: SAMHSA and DOT