

OLDER AMERICANS ACT NUTRITION PROGRAM FACT SHEET

UNITED STATES 2021



Senior hunger and isolation are growing problems – which have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.



BEFORE THE PANDEMIC:



1 IN 3 SENIORS
FELT LONELY



1 IN 8 SENIORS
was threatened by or
experienced hunger

1 IN 4 SENIORS
LIVED ALONE

1 IN 10
EXPERIENCED POVERTY

NEARLY 1 IN 3
LIVED WITH A DISABILITY

FOOD INSECURITY RATES WERE HIGHER FOR BLACK AND HISPANIC SENIORS, and these disparities have only worsened with COVID-19. Black/African American seniors' risk of food insecurity is **MORE THAN TWICE** that of white seniors.

Community-based aging and nutrition services, like Meals on Wheels, have struggled to meet the need for these essential services. Demand has only increased during the COVID-19 pandemic.

If more investments are not made as the older adult population rapidly grows, the unmet need will intensify, and the issues of senior hunger and isolation will escalate in the years to come.

BEFORE THE PANDEMIC: **85% OF LOCAL MEALS ON WHEELS PROGRAMS** surveyed saw at least some **UNMET NEED IN THEIR COMMUNITIES**

12,000 AMERICANS
ARE TURNING 60 EACH DAY



By 2060, **1 IN 3 AMERICANS ARE**
PROJECTED TO BE **60 AND OLDER**

The Older Americans Act (OAA) Nutrition Program is the only federally supported program designed to meet the nutritional and social needs of older adults.

OAA services, like congregate and home-delivered meals, aim to serve groups of older adults living in the community with the **GREATEST SOCIAL OR ECONOMIC NEED**, such as those who:

- have low income;
- are a racial or ethnic minority;
- live in a rural community;
- have limited English proficiency; and/or
- are put at risk of institutionalization



Established under the OAA 50 years ago, in 1972, the **TITLE III-C NUTRITION PROGRAM** aims to:

- reduce hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition;
- promote socialization; and
- improve the health and well-being of older adults

MEALS PROVIDED THROUGH THE OAA NUTRITION PROGRAM ARE DESIGNED TO MEET THE UNIQUE NUTRITION AND HEALTH REQUIREMENTS OF OLDER ADULTS, AND MEALS ARE OFTEN TAILORED TO MEET SPECIFIC MEDICAL NEEDS AND CULTURAL PREFERENCES

The OAA Nutrition Program offers home-delivered meals as well as congregate nutrition services at sites like senior centers – which provide more mobile seniors the opportunity to socially connect.

Frequent interactions with program volunteers and staff offer unique opportunities to meet nutritional needs, combat social isolation, address safety hazards and provide holistic care, all of which enable recipients to remain safer, healthier and more independent in their homes and communities.

223 MILLION MEALS WERE PROVIDED TO 2.4 MILLION OLDER ADULTS THROUGH THE OAA NUTRITION PROGRAM IN 2019

FOR MANY HOME-DELIVERED MEAL RECIPIENTS, THE PERSON DELIVERING THE MEAL IS OFTEN THE ONLY PERSON THEY WILL SEE THAT DAY



The OAA Nutrition Program is a successful public-private partnership and receives the largest portion of federal funding appropriated for programs through the OAA.

Funding sources for local senior nutrition programs vary based on the needs and resources of each community and can be obtained from a diverse range of federal, state, local and private dollars, generating a powerful social and economic return on investment for older adults and taxpayers alike.

Nationally, **THE OAA FUNDS 40% OF THE TOTAL COST TO PROVIDE NUTRITION SERVICES**; the other 60% of funding that serves seniors each year comes from state and/or local sources, private donations from foundations, corporations and individuals, and federal block grants

EXPENDITURES FOR OAA TITLE III-C NUTRITION SERVICES, 2019 ▶



However, programs were serving a smaller portion of the total senior population leading up to the pandemic, and inflation alone had steadily reduced buying power of federal funding over time.

Amid COVID-19, the OAA Nutrition Program has served as a lifeline for older adults and their families as the need and demand for nutrition and socialization services have skyrocketed along with operating expenses for community-based nutrition programs.

Due to persistent pandemic-related challenges, it is likely that Meals on Wheels programs will continue to serve a greater number of older adults, and costs to safely deliver meals are expected to remain high.



At their highest numbers served during the pandemic, programs reported serving an average of about **100% MORE HOME-DELIVERED MEALS** and serving home-delivered meals to **84% MORE SENIORS WEEKLY** than they were before the pandemic began

82% OF LOCAL PROGRAMS agreed, **"NEW CLIENTS ARE HERE TO STAY"**

88% OF LOCAL PROGRAMS SAID COSTS HAD INCREASED due to purchase of personal protective equipment and safety supplies, meal production expenses and/or labor costs

96% OF LOCAL PROGRAMS predicted that **FOOD AND PRODUCTION COSTS WOULD REMAIN HIGH**

Emergency COVID-19 funding provided through the OAA Nutrition Program helped local Meals on Wheels programs serve a lot more seniors during an unprecedented time, but more support is needed to meet the existing need and avoid scaling back or discontinuing service.



(November 2020)

86% OF LOCAL PROGRAMS said there was an **UNMET NEED FOR HOME-DELIVERED MEALS IN THEIR COMMUNITY**



(November 2020)

29% OF LOCAL PROGRAMS said they would need to nearly double or more than double their home-delivered efforts to **SERVE THE UNMET NEED FOR HOME-DELIVERED MEALS IN THEIR COMMUNITY**



(July 2021)

48% OF LOCAL PROGRAMS said they would **NOT BE ABLE TO SUPPORT THEIR CURRENT CLIENT BASE** without continued increased funding



(November 2020)

74% OF LOCAL PROGRAMS believed they would **LOSE THE FINANCIAL SUPPORT** but keep the clients

With greater federal investments in the OAA Nutrition Program, senior nutrition programs across the country will be enabled to continue expanded operations, address current gaps in services and grow to meet the future needs of older adults in the years to come.

