

# ADDRESSING HUNGER AND NUTRITION

## A Tool Kit for Positive Results



National  
Conference  
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Legislatures

## Nutrition and the Elderly

By Katherine Gigliotti

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The Elderly Nutrition Program and Nutrition Services Incentive Program (NSIP) support home and community-based nutrition services for the elderly. The Elderly Nutrition Program was established through the Older Americans Act (OAA) in 1972. NSIP was created through an amendment to the OAA in 1978. NSIP originally was administered through the USDA; however, through reauthorization of the OAA in 2000, it was moved to the Administration on Aging in HHS.

The Elderly Nutrition Program provides grants to states to support congregate and home-delivered meals programs and a range of other nutrition-related services. Congregate meals programs operate in a variety of group settings, including senior citizens centers, faith-based settings and schools, while home-delivered meals provide meals to homebound elderly. Meals served through these services must meet nutritional requirements established by the Dietary Guidelines for Americans. The Elderly Nutrition Program also supports nutrition services such as nutrition screening, assessment, education and counseling to help older participants meet their health and nutrition needs. The programs often provide an important link to other in-home and community-based services such as home health aide services, transportation, and physical activity programs and an opportunity for socializing.

The Nutrition Services Incentive Program provides cash or commodities to supplement the Elderly Nutrition Program and an incentive for the effective delivery of nutritious meals to older adults. State agencies receive a percentage of the NSIP federal appropriations, based upon the number of meals served in the previous year. NSIP funds can be used only for food. They cannot be used for administration or to provide other services. No state match is required for NSIP funds.

The Elderly Nutrition Program and NSIP are federally administered by the Administration on Aging at HHS. Commodities provided through NSIP are received from the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) at the USDA. At the state level, the programs are administered by the state agency funded through Title III of the Older Americans Act, typically the state agency on aging or a department within the state human services agency. Administration then is transferred to the area agency on aging, which plans services throughout a given

region of the state. Local government often serves as the area agency on aging. Based on the service plans, the area agency on aging distributes funding to community organization—such as senior centers or faith-based programs—that provide meal services directly to the elderly. Privately funded meals on wheels programs and assisted living facilities that do not provide meals to the general public are not eligible for NSIP funding, even though they meet OAA requirements.

### Eligibility and Benefits

Individuals age 60 or older and their spouses, regardless of age, are eligible for OAA nutrition programs. There is no means test for participation; however, programs often are targeted to those elderly who have the greatest economic or social need, with particular attention given to low-income minorities and rural elderly people. In addition, the following individuals may receive OAA-funded meals:

- Disabled people under age 60 who reside in housing facilities occupied primarily by the elderly where congregate meals are served;
- Disabled people who reside at home and accompany older people to meals; and
- Nutrition service volunteers.

Under the requirements of both programs, meal recipients must be allowed to contribute as much as they wish toward the cost of the meal; however, a meal cannot be denied if an individual does not contribute. Individuals who participate in a program in which the fees they pay include meals (for

In fiscal year 2003, OAA nutrition programs:<sup>1</sup>

- Provided 142 million home-delivered meals to nearly 1 million elderly individuals.
- Provided 100 million meals to 1.8 million elderly individuals in congregate settings.

In fiscal year 2005, the federal government appropriated:<sup>2</sup>

- \$387 million for congregate meals;
- \$182 million for home-delivered meals; and
- \$148 million for NSIP.

example, an assisted living facility or rest home) are not eligible for elderly meal services.

## Program Issues and Challenges

### *High Demand for Programs*

Elderly nutrition programs face the challenge of not being able to meet current demand. Although statistics regarding wait-list time or excess demand are not available, broad agreement exists among program administrators that demand highly exceeds program capacity. Home-delivered meals programs are seeing an increasing number of homebound and frail elderly who require special diets, which further strain the resources of home-delivered meals programs. In addition, home-delivered meals programs rely on volunteers, who are increasingly difficult to find. Many former volunteers now are homebound and are recipients of home-delivered meals.

### *Meeting the Nutrition Needs of “New” Elderly*

Program administrators report that many congregate and home-delivered meals program operations have not changed since they began more than 30 years ago. As the baby-boomer generation retires, the program will need to adapt to address physical fitness while providing nutrition counseling to help senior citizens manage chronic diseases such as diabetes and high blood pressure. Not only must elderly individuals learn about the type of diet required to manage chronic disease, but family members they live with also must receive nutrition counseling.

## Program Models and Promising Practices

### *Nutrition Education for Senior Citizens*

In Iowa, the Chef Charles Club is a senior nutrition education initiative supported through a partnership between the Department of Elder Affairs and the Iowa Nutrition Network at the Iowa Department of Public Health. The program, which operates in conjunction with congregate meal services

supported through the Elderly Nutrition Program, aims to educate senior citizens about the specific nutrition and physical activity needs of older adults. It publishes a monthly newsletter, available at congregate meal sites, with nutrition information and recipe ideas. The Chef Charles Club also supports activities such as nutrition-themed bingo and a nutrition education curriculum to be used in congregate meal settings. Funding for the Chef Charles Club initiative comes from the Food Stamp Nutrition Education Program and the state.

Additional information can be found at: [http://www.idph.state.ia.us/nutritionnetwork/chef\\_charles/.asp](http://www.idph.state.ia.us/nutritionnetwork/chef_charles/.asp). A recent Chef Charles Club newsletter can be viewed at: [http://www.idph.state.ia.us/nutritionnetwork/pdf/chef\\_charles/newsletter\\_05\\_2005.pdf](http://www.idph.state.ia.us/nutritionnetwork/pdf/chef_charles/newsletter_05_2005.pdf).

## Resources

- Administration on Aging at HHS: <http://www.aoa.gov/>
- Nutrition Information from the Administration on Aging: <http://www.aoa.gov/eldfam/Nutrition/Nutrition.asp>
- Elderly Nutrition Program: [http://www.aoa.gov/press/fact/pdf/fs\\_nutrition.pdf](http://www.aoa.gov/press/fact/pdf/fs_nutrition.pdf)
- Nutrition Services Incentive Program: [http://www.aoa.gov/eldfam/Nutrition/Nutrition\\_services\\_incentive.asp](http://www.aoa.gov/eldfam/Nutrition/Nutrition_services_incentive.asp)

## Notes

1. NSIP supplements programs funded through Title III of the OAA; thus, the number of meals and individuals served are not calculated separately.

2. This number reflects the federal appropriation for congregate meals programs and home-delivered meals programs. Depending on need, states have the flexibility to transfer funds between congregate programs and home-delivered programs, so actual spending could differ.

### Contact Information:

Hunger and Nutrition Partnership  
National Conference of State Legislatures  
444 North Capitol Street, N.W., Suite 515  
Washington, D.C. 20001

### Project Staff:

Ann Morse, Program Director, (202) 624-5400, [ann.morse@ncsl.org](mailto:ann.morse@ncsl.org)  
Katherine Gigliotti, Policy Associate, (202) 624-8691, [katherine.gigliotti@ncsl.org](mailto:katherine.gigliotti@ncsl.org)  
Project Web site: [www.ncsl.org/programs/immig/hungerpartnership.htm](http://www.ncsl.org/programs/immig/hungerpartnership.htm)

Definitions of commonly used hunger and nutrition terms can be found in NCSL's Hunger and Nutrition Partnership *Glossary of Hunger and Nutrition Terms* at <http://www.ncsl.org/programs/immig/Glossary.htm>.