Economic and Resource Issues Surrounding Nutrition Services for Older Persons in the Community Setting

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There are Four Nutrition Assistance Programs that Specifically target Older Adults and Several More They Can Participate In

Nutrition Assistance Programs Specifically for Older Adults

- Older Americans Act Elderly Nutrition Program (OAA Elderly Nutrition Program)
- Senior Farmers’ Market Nutrition Program
- Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP)*
- Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)**

Nutrition Assistance Programs that Allow Older Adult Participation

- Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)
- The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP)
- The Emergency Food and Shelter National Board Program
- Certain older adults may be eligible for services through: the Community Food Projects Competitive Grant Program; the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations; Grants to American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian Organizations for Nutrition and Supportive Services; and the Nutrition Assistance for Puerto Rico.

*CSFP is targeted to low-income pregnant and breastfeeding women, other new mothers up to one year postpartum, infants, children up to their sixth birthday, and elderly persons at least 60 years of age who meet income eligibility requirements.

**CACFP is targeted to children, the elderly, and special groups: Children in certain nonresidential child care centers, family, or group day care; children in after school programs in low-income areas, or residing in emergency shelters; and chronically impaired disabled adults and persons 60 years or older in adult day care centers.
Federal Spending on and Participation in Primary Nutrition Assistance Programs Available to Older Adults

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>FY 2008 Federal Spending (in millions of dollars)*</th>
<th>FY 2008 Participation (Approximate)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>OAA Elderly Nutrition Program</td>
<td>745.0</td>
<td>More than 2.5 million seniors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior Farmers’ Market Nutrition Program</td>
<td>20.1</td>
<td>953,00 low-income seniors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSFP</td>
<td>100.4</td>
<td>440,000 elderly and 31,000 women, infants and children (avg. per month)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CACFP</td>
<td>2,394.1</td>
<td>108,00 adults and 3.1 million children (avg. per day)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SNAP</td>
<td>37,645.4</td>
<td>28.4 million people/12.7 million households (avg. per month)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TEFAP</td>
<td>230.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emergency Food and Shelter National Board Program</td>
<td>140.1</td>
<td>73 million meals served</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*In 2008, the federal government spent over $62 billion on 18 federal food and nutrition assistance programs. In 2010, the federal government spent more than $90 billion on domestic food assistance programs. This represents an increase of approximately 44 percent over 2008 spending, driven largely by increased spending on the SNAP.*
The OAA Elderly Nutrition Program: Program Goals

• Reduce hunger and food insecurity.
• Promote socialization of older individuals.
• Promote the health and well-being of older individuals by increasing access to nutrition and other disease prevention and health promotion services.
Research Suggests that the OAA Elderly Nutrition Program is Effective in Meeting its Program Goals

Research on the effectiveness of the OAA Elderly Nutrition Program is limited, but suggests participation*:

- May reduce food insecurity
- Increases socialization
- Improves participants’ dietary and nutrient intake

*Some of the research on the program focuses on pilot or demonstration projects which may not reflect the way the program currently operates nationwide and is therefore only suggestive of possible effects. For example, one of the two studies that suggest the program has a positive effect on food security was of a pilot program that provided two meals a day rather than the traditional one meal.
**Elderly Nutrition Program: Effectiveness (cont.)**

- One study found that elderly diabetics receiving home-delivered meals were less likely to be food-insecure or go one or more days a month without food than comparable elders on a waiting list for the program.\(^1\)

- A second study found that OAA Elderly Nutrition Program participants had higher levels of socialization and higher levels of nutrient intake than similar nonparticipants.\(^2\)
  - Study also finds that program is well-targeted; reaching at-risk older persons, including low-income, minority, and the frail.

- A third study found that for older home-bound women receiving home-delivered meals, nutrient intake was lower on weekend days when meals were not delivered than on weekdays.\(^3\)
Research Suggests that SNAP is Effective in Meeting some of its Program Goals but Not Much is Known About the Effectiveness of Other Programs

- Research on the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program has found participation*:
  - Increases household food expenditures
  - Increases nutrient availability to household
  - May reduce anemia and other nutritional deficiencies

- There is too little research available to determine whether the CACFP, CSFP, TEFAP, Senior Farmers’ Market Nutrition Program, or Emergency Food and Shelter National Board Program are effective in meeting their program goals.

*Research on SNAP generally finds impacts at the household rather than individual level. Research has found little impact of SNAP participation on the dietary or nutrient intake of individuals, possibly because not all individuals in the household share equally in SNAP benefits. Also, most of the studies did not focus on SNAP’s effects on older adults specifically.
Research Suggests Possible Ways to Strengthen the OAA Elderly Nutrition Program

Limited research suggests modifications to the OAA Elderly Nutrition Program could further improve its ability to meet its goal.

- One study of a pilot program which provided home-delivered breakfasts in addition to lunches found that the group receiving breakfast had greater levels of food security and consumed more calories, protein, carbohydrates, fiber, and minerals than the control group.\(^4\)

- A second study of a different pilot program found that providing “enhanced” home-delivered meals that were higher in energy density increased calorie and nutrient intake.\(^5\)
Additional Research on Effectiveness on the OAA Elderly Nutrition Program Would be Useful

• Additional research on congregate and home-delivered meal services would be beneficial.
  • Available research is limited
  • Available research is dated
  • Additional research could focus on pilot programs to help identify model programs
Some Overlap, Duplication, and Fragmentation Exists in Nutrition Assistance Programs

Some nutrition assistance programs provide comparable benefits to similar/overlapping populations, including those for older adults.

- OAA Elderly Nutrition Program and Commodity Supplemental Food Program both target older adults.
- Older adults may be eligible for similar benefits through the CSFP and TEFAP.
- Older adults may participate in the OAA Elderly Nutrition Program, SNAP, and other programs.

Multiple programs help ensure those in need have access to needed nutrition, but may increase administrative costs, lead to inefficient use of federal funds, and create confusion among providers and recipients.
Despite Existing Programs, Many Older Adults Still Food Insecure

- In 2009, nearly a fifth of low-income older adults were food insecure*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Low food security</th>
<th>Very low food security</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All households</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All households less than 185 percent of poverty</td>
<td>20.4</td>
<td>14.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All households less than 100 percent of poverty</td>
<td>24.4</td>
<td>18.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elderly households (age 60 and older)</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elderly households less than 185 percent of poverty</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elderly households less than 100 percent of poverty</td>
<td>16.9</td>
<td>14.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


* For the purposes of this presentation, “low-income” refers to individuals in householders below 185 percent of the poverty line.
Many Older Adults Likely Needed But Did Not Participate in Meals Programs

• According to our analysis of 2008 CPS data:
  • Approximately 9 percent of low-income older adults received home-delivered or congregate meals services including those provided by the OAA Elderly Nutrition Program and other sources
  • Many more low-income older adults did not receive these meals services, but likely needed them due to food insecurity, difficulties with daily activities, and/or limited social interaction
Many Older Adults Likely Needed But Did Not Participate in Meals Programs (Cont.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics of likely need</th>
<th>Have each characteristc</th>
<th>Received homedelivered meals</th>
<th>Did not receive homedelivered meals</th>
<th>Received congregate meals</th>
<th>Did not receive congregate meals</th>
<th>Received either type of meal</th>
<th>Received neither type of meal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Food security</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food secure</td>
<td>31.4</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>96.7</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>94.3</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>91.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food insecure</td>
<td>18.6</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>92.6</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>95.1</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>88.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Numbers of difficulties with daily activities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>85.2</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>97.7</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>94.9</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>93.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One</td>
<td>18.0</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>96.4</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>93.7</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>91.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two or more</td>
<td>16.8</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>88.5</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>93.6</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>83.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social isolation*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less isolated</td>
<td>31.8</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>97.5</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>93.9</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>92.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More isolated</td>
<td>41.4</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>95.0</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>95.0</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>91.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing*</td>
<td>26.8</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>95.5</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>94.2</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>90.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: GAO analysis of 2009 CPS data.

a We defined likely need for more social interaction as answering “no” to all Current Population Survey (CPS) civic engagement supplement questions about the older adult’s participation in social activities. However, such survey data cannot capture more qualitative aspects of an individual older adults’ likely need.

b Approximately 27 percent of the older adults with low incomes in our sample provided information about participation in meals programs, but not about participation in social groups.
Older Adults May Not Access Meals Programs For a Variety of Reasons

Older adults may:

- have limited awareness of service availability
- live in areas with a limited supply of services
- receive informal services through friends and family
- choose not to obtain government help
- receive food assistance from other programs such as SNAP
Requests for OAA Elderly Nutrition Program Services Increasing

• Through our survey of local agencies conducted in the summer of 2010:
  • Approximately 79 percent of agencies had seen increased requests for home-delivered meals since the start of the economic downturn
  • Approximately 47 percent had seen increased requests for congregate meals since the start of the economic downturn

• According to U.S. Census data, more than 9 million more Americans were 60 years and older in 2009 than in 2000, and the Census Bureau projects that population group will continue to grow.

• Officials also attributed some of the increased requests to seniors staying in their homes longer rather than moving to assisted living facilities
Demand for OAA Elderly Nutrition Home-Delivered Meals is Growing More Rapidly than for Congregate Meals

- In our 2010 survey, an estimated 22 percent of agencies said they were unable to serve all clients who request home-delivered meals, compared to an estimated 5 percent who expressed the same concern about congregate meals.

- The Congressional Research Service found that although congregate meal programs served more clients than home-delivered meal programs in fiscal year 2008, from 1990 to 2008, the number of home-delivered meals served grew by almost 44 percent, while the number of congregate meals served declined by 34 percent.

*See Kirsten J. Colello, Older Americans Act: Title III Nutrition Services Program Congressional Research Service, RS21202 (Feb. 1, 2010).
Agencies Adjust for Changing Demand by Transferring Funds Between Meals Programs

From fiscal year 2000 through fiscal year 2008, states collectively transferred an average of $67 million out of the congregate meal program each year and into other OAA programs such as home-delivered meals and support services.*

*OAA support services include home-based care and transportation. The amounts in the figure above represent the average yearly fund transfers among OAA programs during fiscal years 2000-2008.
Closing Summary

- Multiple federal programs provide services to help address older adults’ nutritional needs.
- While existing studies suggest that major programs like the OAA Elderly Nutrition Program are effective in achieving their goals, more research on nutrition programs for older adults is needed.
- The existence of multiple programs helps ensure those in need have access to needed nutrition, but may increase administrative costs, lead to inefficient use of federal funds, and create confusion among providers and recipients.
Closing Summary (Cont.)

- Despite the existence of multiple federal programs providing nutrition services to older adults, many older adults likely need home-delivered or congregate meals but do not receive them.

- In particular, demand for home-delivered meals has grown in recent years and OAA Elderly Nutrition Program agencies have taken steps to try to address this need.
Related GAO Work:

- **Nutrition Assistance:** Additional Efficiencies Could Improve Services to Older Adults, GAO-11-782T, (Washington, D.C.: June 21, 2011).

- **Domestic Food Assistance:** Complex System Benefits Millions, but Additional Efforts Could Address Potential Inefficiency and Overlap among Smaller Programs, GAO-10-346, (Washington, D.C.: April 15, 2010).

References


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