



# Older Americans Act Nutrition Programs

## INTRODUCTION

Adequate nutrition is critical to health, physical ability, and quality of life; and it is an important component of home and community-based services for older people.

## NUTRITION PROGRAMS

The Older Americans Act (OAA) Nutrition Programs, part of the Administration on Aging within the Administration for Community Living, provide grants to states to help support nutrition services for older people throughout the country. The OAA Nutrition Programs include the Congregate Nutrition Program and the Home-Delivered Nutrition Program. The Older Americans Act Title III grants authorize programs for State and Community Programs on Aging; and the Title VI Grants authorize programs for American Indians, Alaskan Natives and Native Hawaiians. The purposes of these programs are to 1) reduce hunger and food insecurity, 2) promote socialization, 3) promote health and well-being, and 4) delay adverse health conditions. The intent is to make community-based nutrition services available to older adults who may be at risk of losing their independence and their ability to remain in the community.

The programs provide health-promoting meals in a variety of group settings, such as senior centers, and faith-based settings, as well as in the homes of frail, isolated homebound older adults. Meals provide at least one-third of the recommended Dietary Reference Intakes established by the Food and Nutrition Board of the Institute of Medicine of the National Academy of Sciences, and adhere to the current Dietary Guidelines for Americans, issued by

the Secretaries of the Departments of Health and Human Services and Agriculture.

The OAA Nutrition Programs also provide a range of related services through the aging network's over 3,500 home-delivered meal providers and over 4,100 congregate meal providers.<sup>1</sup> These related nutritional services include, but are not limited to, nutrition screening, assessment, education and counseling.

In addition, the Programs provide an important link to other supportive in-home and community-based services such as homemaker and home-health aide services, transportation, physical activity programs, chronic disease self-management programs, home repair and modification, and falls prevention programs.

The Congregate Nutrition Program, established in 1972, serves healthy meals while also presenting opportunities for social engagement, health and wellness activities and meaningful volunteer roles, all of which contribute to health and well-being.

The Home-Delivered Nutrition Program provides healthy meals delivered to the home, and in most cases an informal "safety check" for homebound older individuals. Established in 1978, the home-delivered program is often the first in-home service that an older adult receives and serves as a primary access point for other home and community-based services. Volunteers and paid staff who deliver meals to homebound older adults often spend time with the individual, helping to decrease feelings of

---

<sup>1</sup> 2014 State Program Report



isolation. Volunteers and paid staff who deliver meals are encouraged to report any health or other issues that they may observe during their visits.

## ELIGIBILITY

In general, under the OAA, a person must be 60 years of age or older to be eligible for the nutrition programs. While there is no income/means test, services are targeted to older individuals who have the greatest economic or social need, have low income, are a member of a low-income minority group, reside in a rural area, have limited English proficiency or are at risk of institutionalization.

## OAA NUTRITION PROGRAMS ARE:

- Highly rated by recipients; 95-96% of participants would recommend the OAA Nutrition Programs to a friend.<sup>2</sup>
- Highly effective; 93% of home-delivered nutrition participants stated the program helps them live at home.<sup>2</sup>

## GOOD NUTRITION IS VITAL TO HEALTH

Due in part to advances in public health and medical care, Americans are living longer and more active lives. The average life expectancy of an American has increased dramatically over the last century. One consequence of this increased longevity is the higher incidence of chronic conditions. Multiple chronic conditions can negatively affect quality of life, contribute to declines in functioning and the ability to remain in the community, adversely impact individuals' health and contribute to increased hospitalizations and health care costs. Nutrition is a primary prevention, risk reduction or treatment modality for many of the most common chronic conditions such as hypertension, heart disease, diabetes and osteoporosis. Data from AoA's national survey of older adult participants indicate:

- 57% of congregate and 71% of home-delivered participants, have five or more chronic health conditions.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> 2014 National Survey of OAA Participants

- 32% of congregate and 51% of home-delivered participants take six or more different prescription medications per day and some home-delivered nutrition participants take up to 30 different prescription medications per day.<sup>2</sup>

Because of the prevalence of multiple chronic conditions among congregate and home-delivered program participants, the provision of healthy meals, access to lifestyle modification programs and evidence-based advice such as nutrition education and counseling are important. The nutrition programs provide much more than access to healthy meals. They provide an opportunity for social connectiveness, which supports physical, mental and social well-being.<sup>3</sup>

## OAA NUTRITION PROGRAMS ARE EFFECTIVE AT TARGETING SERVICES:

- 63% of Home-Delivered Nutrition Program participants related that the program meal provides ½ or more of their food for the day.<sup>4</sup>
- 52% of Home-Delivered Nutrition Program participants live alone.<sup>4</sup>
- 69% of Home-Delivered Nutrition Program participants are over the age of 75.<sup>4</sup>
- 46% of Congregate Nutrition Program participants live alone.<sup>4</sup>
- 57% of Congregate Nutrition Program participants are over the age of 75.<sup>4</sup>

## FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT ACL

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
Administration for Community Living  
Washington DC 20201  
Phone: (202) 401-4634  
Email: [ACLinfo@acl.hhs.gov](mailto:ACLinfo@acl.hhs.gov)  
Web: <http://www.ACL.gov>

---

<sup>3</sup> HealthyPeople 2020, Health-Related Quality of Life and Well-Being

<sup>4</sup> 2014 National Survey of OAA Participants

