

# The Texan Way to Congregate

Texas' innovative project to modernize congregate meals

## Social Determinants of Health:

Social determinants of health (SDOH) are the conditions in the environment where people are born, live, work, play, worship and age. They affect a wide range of health, functioning, and quality of life outcomes and risks.

The Texas Congregate Meal Initiative (TCMI) focuses on the following SDOH objectives:

1. Decreasing household food insecurity and hunger
2. Increasing health literacy of the population

## Overview of the program:

The TCMI project identifies, develops, and implements innovative low-cost and sustainable congregate meal pilot projects at sixteen (16) Texas congregate meal sites. Through a gap analysis and a learning collaborative model, four types of innovations are identified.

1. *Technology-based programming*
2. *Creative dining models*
3. *Health and wellness programming*
4. *Marketing and rebranding*

The goal of the project is to improve the well-being of older Texans by modernizing local congregate programs. Desired outcomes:

- Increased business acumen
- Improved program development skills
- Increased client participation
- Increased client satisfaction
- Improved well-being and social integration of Older American Act (OAA) clients

## Partners:

TCMI is a collaboration between the Texas Health and Human Services Commission, Public Policy Research Institute (PPRI) at Texas A&M University, Texas A&M Mays Business School, SNAP-Ed, sixteen (16) selected congregate nutrition providers, and their corresponding area agencies on aging (AAAs). The pilots works with local community partners such as food banks, pantries, churches, parks and rec., hospitals, community colleges, local industries, culinary schools, restaurants, craft stores, advertising agencies, industries etc.

## Funding and Sustainability:

Funding includes a braiding of resources including those provided through the Older Americans Act as well as the following:

- Governments
- Businesses
- Health-focused organizations
- Entertainment and learning subscriptions
- Community Development Block Grant
- Revenue generation through pay-for-service mechanisms
- In kind support (curriculum, volunteers, teachers, chefs)

The pilot projects have a strong potential of continued sustainability in their own communities because of the low-cost nature of the pilots, in-kind community partnerships, volunteer and client ambassadors, replicable sponsorships and donations, sustainable equipment, facilities, and resources.

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Healthy People 2030

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# Timeline

## 2019

- Summer 2019
  - **Data Gathering:** Obtained data on Texas congregate meal participation trends.
  - **Grant Proposal:** Wrote grant proposal for 2019 Administration for Community Living (ACL) Innovations in Nutrition Programs and Services (INNU) grant along with letters of commitment from project partners.
- September 2019
  - **Awarded Grant:** Received ACL INNU grant.
- Fall 2019
  - **IRB Approval:** Received approval of IRB application for project methodology and status determination.
  - **Asset Mapping:** Conducted asset mapping and developed survey instruments to identify barriers and needs.
- Winter 2019
  - **IRB Application:** Applied to IRB for survey instruments and comprehensive needs assessment.
  - **Conducted Surveys:** Conducted literature survey, developed three surveys (Older American Panel Survey, Survey of organizations serving Older Americans in Texas, Community Health Provider Survey), collected data on congregate meal program barriers and facilitators, and analyzed data. Worked with a sample provider company and the Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) to field the surveys.
  - **Training Development:** With subject matter expert partners, began to develop innovative training material informed by data collected from the needs assessment.

## 2020

- Spring & Summer 2020
  - **Focus Group:** Developed a focus group guide to revalidate and reconfirm survey data with larger numbers of aging stakeholders, including statewide nutrition providers and aging service providers. Recruited past and present program directors, assistant directors, site supervisors, community health providers, and other key staff to participate in focus groups. Conducted 29 focus groups in 28 AAAs to process and analyze data.
- Fall and Winter 2020
  - **Selection of Pilot Projects:** Developed application for nutrition providers to apply to participate in the TCMI Learning Collaborative and selected 16 TCMI pilot projects through an application process.
  - **Curriculum & Evaluation Material:** Developed and finalized curriculum and evaluation material.
  - **Pilot Project Virtual Workshop:** Conducted Learning Collaborative virtual workshop with TCMI pilot projects and their AAAs.
  - **Pilot Project Technical Assistance:** Assisted developing pilot project logic models and technical assistance to refine pilot project ideas.
  - **Website:** Developed a project website as project repertoire.

## 2021

- Spring, Summer & Fall 2021
  - **Data Tracking:** Tracked data and provided workshop participants with collaboration opportunities to discuss successes, implementation tips, and challenges.
  - **Pre-implementation Meetings:** Held grouped pre-implementation meetings and helped congregate meal sites that have staffing challenges.
  - **Evaluation Protocols:** Developed all evaluation protocols: program manager survey, client survey, baseline survey. Integrated evidence-based scales for all outcome tracking. Programmed all data metrics in an impact management software to showcase outcome data.
  - **Project Findings:** Shared project findings for replicability and sustainability lessons and findings at key targeted state and national conferences in the aging field.
- Winter 2021
  - **Business Proposals:** Pilot project sites develop and implement innovative business proposals based on their pandemic reopening schedules.

## 2022

- Spring, Summer, and Fall 2022
  - **Data Tracking:** Track data and provide workshop participants data storyboarding sessions and opportunity to discuss challenges, successes, promises, and related tips.
  - **Evaluation:** Conduct cross-site Evaluation following a mixed-methods process and outcome-based approach. Collect data three times during implementation.
  - **Present Findings:** Publish research findings in two academic journals. Present in key targeted conferences.
  - **Evaluation Report:** Develop cross-site comprehensive evaluation report. Help pilot project sites share data stories and facilitate Learning Collaborative-based learning on successes and challenges.
  - **Share Findings:** Share findings with the Texas aging network. Help pilot project sites share their stories and highlights.
  - **End of Project Summit:** Conduct an end-of-project summit in September 2022 to disseminate pilot project success outcomes data and tools.

## Advice for Replication:

*“First, to replicate the successful TCMI program models, it would be very important to pay attention to the positive evaluation outcomes and duplicate the core components and implementation practices by fully understanding what works best under which conditions and for which target population. Secondly, any project developer needs to collaborate with project adopters and/or expert consultants to ensure that the developer’s selected project is implemented with integrity and fidelity to the project model and its proven outcomes.”*

Nandita Chaudhuri, Ph.D. | Research Scientist | Public Policy Research Institute (PPRI) Texas A&M University

## Tools and Resources:

1. [Texas Congregate Meal Initiative Website](#)
2. American Society on Aging (May, 2021), *Envisioning a New Future for Congregate Meals*, <https://online.flipplingbook.com/view/130836025/>
3. Administration for Community Living, Innovations in Nutrition Programs and Services, <https://acl.gov/programs/nutrition/innovations-nutrition-programs-and-services-0>
4. Data collected from the U.S. Census Bureau’s Factfinder database. Accessed at: <https://factfinder.census.gov>
5. Data collected on participation trends collected by the Administration on Aging: Aging Integrated Database (AGID). Accessed at: <https://agid.acl.gov/>
6. Rapid Cycle Quality Improvement (RCQI) A Resource Guide to Accelerate Improvement Efforts for Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) Grantees. 2016. [http://www.healthworkforceta.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/RCQI\\_Resource\\_Guide.pdf](http://www.healthworkforceta.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/RCQI_Resource_Guide.pdf)
7. Healthy People 2030, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. Retrieved July 27, 2022, from <https://health.gov/healthypeople/objectives-and-data/social-determinants-health>