Webinar #4 | Food Insecurity Tip Sheet

The Older Americans Act (OAA) Senior Nutrition Program (SNP) helps individuals aged 60 years and older remain healthy and independent in their communities by providing congregate and home-delivered meals along with other services. The overall intention of the OAA is to reduce hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition, promote socialization, and delay the onset of adverse health conditions through access to nutrition, health promotion/disease prevention services, and access to other home and community-based services.[1]

Older Adult Food Insecurity

The OAA has been in existence for almost 50 years, but hunger, food insecurity, and malnutrition continue to be a top concern. The U.S. Department of Agriculture defines food insecurity as a household-level economic and social condition of limited or uncertain access to adequate food[2]. In 2018, 2.9 million food-insecure households included an adult age 65 or older[3]. About 10 million or 1 in 6 older adults face the threat of hunger[4].

Food security/insecurity is a basic social determinant of health (SDOH). Access to safe, adequate, nutritious, quality food and fluid is essential for life, health, disease risk reduction, and chronic disease management. Food insecurity can increase the likelihood of a whole range of illnesses and conditions. Food insecure older adults are at increased risk for the following[5] –

- 50% are more likely to have diabetes
- 60% more likely to have congestive heart failure or a heart attack
- 30% more likely to have at least one Activities of Daily Living impairment
- 2 times as likely to report gum disease and asthma
- 3 times more likely to suffer from depression

Innovation in Nutrition Programs and Services Grantee Projects

Since 2017, the Administration for Community Living (ACL) has funded Innovations in Nutrition Programs and Services grants to support the testing and documentation of innovative and promising practices. The program aims to enhance the quality, effectiveness, and proven outcomes of nutrition services within the aging services network. Two 2018 grantees shared their projects during a webinar conducted in March 2020.

AgeOptions is an Area Agency on Aging (AAA) located in Illinois. The organization is a planning agency and provides direct services and funds local agencies to provide services to community members. The AgeOptions grant project's objective is to decrease the prevalence of food insecurity and increase the

likelihood patients experiencing food insecurity will receive and act upon referrals to community-based resources. AgeOptions uses a closed-loop referral system between healthcare and nutrition providers to increase referrals from healthcare providers to community nutrition programs. The referral system also increases patient access and utilization of community nutrition programs and benefit programs (e.g., SNAP, Medicaid) and community evidence-based wellness programs.

Key learnings from the AgeOptions grant project include:

- Social workers generated the majority of referrals (83%) using a SDOH screening tool; the remainder of referrals came from the client's primary care physician or advanced practice nurse
- 68% of referrals were from the outpatient setting, 16% from the emergency department, and 16% from the inpatient setting
- Most of the referrals result from a conversation and use of the SDOH screening tool, with the remainder coming from a patient conversation alone
- 67% of the referral sources indicated the on-line referral platform improved the likelihood that a referral agent would initiate a referral
- Nearly 50% of the referring agents indicated that they do not routinely check the outcome of their home and community-based service referrals
- Utilization of the "closed-loop system" enhances positive outcomes

Erie County Department of Senior Services (Senior Services) located in Erie County, New York, is an Innovations in Nutrition Programs and Services grant and is home to many programs designed to ensure that Erie County's community-based older adults always have food on the table. Another goal of their SNP includes educating the public on nutrition and health. Below is a summary of their grant project:

- **Go & Dine** - The Go & Dine Program is an extension of the Stay Fit Dining Program for Erie County residents 60 years and older. Participants receive vouchers monthly to use at restaurants, which they use to order from the special Go & Dine menu. All meals meet the nutrition requirements for an SNP congregate meal. The goal is to allow seniors to eat at a time of their choosing, select what they want to eat, and decide whom they want to eat. The intention of the program is to reduce social isolation while providing quality nutrition. A donation of $3 per meal is suggested, but no one is denied service because of the inability to contribute. All proceeds are returned to the program to serve older adults in the community.

Senior Services offers the following programs to enhance the health and nutritional status of older adults:

- Healthy Cooking Demonstrations – Instructors teach simple, healthy cooking techniques that seniors can follow and use at home. Seniors attend the cooking demonstration and stay for a delicious lunch. Erie County case managers work with different community partners to provide SNAP outreach during the cooking demonstrations and lunch.

- **Farmer's Market Coupons** - Coupons are distributed on a first-come, first-served basis at selected sites in Erie County. One $20.00 booklet is issued per person per year based on household income. Case managers work with seniors who want the Farmer's Market coupon. Over 3,600 coupons were distributed last year.

More information about other Innovations in Nutrition Programs and Services grant projects can be found at https://nutritionandaging.org/innovation-services-hub/.

References

[1]https://acl.gov/about-acl/authorizing-statutes/older-americans-act

[2]https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-us/definitions-of-food-security.aspx)

[3]https://www.frac.org/hunger-poverty-america/senior-hunger

[4]https://www.mealsonwheelsamerica.org/docs/default-source/research/hungerinolderadults-fullreport-feb2017.pdf?sfvrsn=2

[5]Ibid