



Webinar #1

Make Your Mark: Nutrition and Socialization

The Older Americans Act authorizes nutrition services under Title III-C. The purposes of the National Senior Nutrition Program are to reduce hunger and food insecurity, promote socialization, and delay the onset of adverse health conditions. The role of promoting socialization has often been undervalued, underfunded and under researched in the Aging Services Network. To address this situation, the Administration on Aging is celebrating the National Senior Nutrition Program in March by focusing on the congregate nutrition program, its role in promoting socialization in the lives of participants, community research, congregate program innovations and ways to encourage participation. [Watch the Webinar #1](#) and hear the audio of [Nutrition and Socialization](#).

Local Community Research

[Living Connected-Baltimore County Department on Aging: Living Longer-Living Well-Living Connected](#)

- Research demonstrates the negative effects of isolation and loneliness on physical, mental, emotional health.
- The [National Council on Aging](#) (NCOA) [Adult Well-Being Assessment](#) is a reliable and valid tool that collects data on social and behavioral determinants of health for older adults.
- Using this tool, the Baltimore County Department on Aging in collaboration with NCOA demonstrated that Congregate Nutrition Program participants are at higher negative risk than community non-participants in the areas of life satisfaction, optimism, physical well-being, mental well-being, financial well-being, and social and emotional support. Because of this negative high risk, socialization interventions need to be designed to address these matters.
- The Baltimore County Department on Aging initiated the No Senior Eats Alone Day for congregate and home-delivered program participants which encourages community members to share a meal with an older adult. Over 40 community partners such as the Islamic Society of Baltimore, Goucher College, Baltimore Community College, public libraries, places of worship, fitness centers, and county employees participated, some visiting older adults in their homes. The event raised awareness of the importance of social isolation and an intervention which allowed meaningful interactions with older adults and a wide variety of community members.
- **Learn how to use the Adult Well-Being Assessment to determine the risk for your congregate participants.**
- **Develop your own No Senior Eats Alone Day.**

[Value of Socialization-National Association of Nutrition and Aging Services Programs \(NANASP\)](#)

- The Retirement Research Foundation funded NANASP to study the value of socialization for older adults who participate in the Congregate Nutrition Program. Over 25 programs in 12 states completed 3,000 surveys during the three-year study.
- A major finding was that meeting and talking with friends, both new and old, was a primary reason to attend congregate sites. Survey participants indicated that because of attending, they

had more friends, improved their physical health, exercised more, and improved their knowledge of healthy eating. A common response was that the program was a reason to get up in the morning. The Congregate Nutrition Program helped keep people functional and engaged in the community.

- Social interaction impacted participants overall well-being.
- **Use the NANASP Survey to document the positive results of your Congregate Nutrition Program.**

[Future Proofing the Congregate Nutrition Program](#)

- [The National Resource Center on Nutrition and Aging](#) (NRCNA) and [NANASP](#) worked together to produce a literature review, proceedings from a convening, conference presentations, virtual summits, issue briefs and a leader's lab to address the challenges facing the congregate nutrition program, in documents, called [Future Proofing the Congregate Nutrition Program](#).
- The literature review, Congregate Nutrition Programs: An Exploration of Current Challenges and Future Opportunities, found that "as the older adult population grows and becomes increasingly diverse, congregate nutrition programs face new challenges, including combating rising rates of hunger and food insecurity, increasing rates of chronic disease, funding and program planning issues, demographic shifts, regional issues, and general program perception issues."
- During the convening, Congregate Nutrition Program leaders addressed these challenges through a group process that identified root causes, diagrammed assets, and discussed local solutions and opportunities.
- One result was three short issue briefs with possible local program solutions to challenges identified in the convening and virtual summits:
 - Improving the Dining Experience for Overall Satisfaction
 - Strategies to Enhance Nutrition Training for Congregate Nutrition Program Staff
 - Congregate Nutrition Program Myth Busters.
- Together the materials developed identify practices and solutions to help re-energize and enhance the congregate nutrition program.
- **Use the information in the reports to educate your stakeholders.**
- **Re-energize your Congregate Program with ideas from the issue briefs.**

Conclusion

Research has shown that social isolation and loneliness are detrimental to health and well-being. A primary purpose of the Older Americans Act Senior Nutrition Program is to promote socialization to help maintain health. A primary component of the Senior Nutrition Program, the Congregate Nutrition Program, is often undervalued and may receive fewer resources (funding, training, other supports) than other home and community-based services. Community research demonstrates that congregate participants are at higher negative risk for adverse health effects and that participation in the Congregate Nutrition Program provides valuable social interactions that helps maintain the health and well-being. The documents from Future Proofing the Congregate Program underscore how Congregate Nutrition Programs can improve their local congregate program and enhance its value to the community. **Use the research as a foundation to demonstrate value. Use the Future Proofing of Congregate to put that value into action.**