

OLDER AMERICANS ACT NUTRITION PROGRAM ISSUE BRIEF



UNITED STATES 2021

Senior hunger and isolation are growing problems – which have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.



The pandemic has disproportionately affected older adults of color due to racial health and economic disparities that have persisted across the country.

BEFORE THE PANDEMIC:



**1 IN 3 SENIORS
FELT LONELY**



1 IN 8 SENIORS
was threatened by or
experienced hunger

**1 IN 4 SENIORS
LIVED ALONE**

**1 IN 10
EXPERIENCED POVERTY**

**NEARLY 1 IN 3
LIVED WITH A DISABILITY**

FOOD INSECURITY RATES WERE HIGHER FOR BLACK AND HISPANIC SENIORS, and these disparities have only worsened with COVID-19. Black/African American seniors' risk of food insecurity is **MORE THAN TWICE** that of white seniors.

While food insecurity rates varied over the pandemic period, in July 2020, the percentage of seniors aged 60 and older who sometimes or often **DID NOT HAVE ENOUGH FOOD TO EAT INCREASED BY 75%.**

Community-based programs that provide nutrition and social support services for seniors, like Meals on Wheels, have struggled to meet the need for these essential services. The need has only increased since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

BEFORE THE PANDEMIC:

Among older adults who have difficulties with daily activities, **MORE THAN 67% WERE RECEIVING LIMITED OR NO HOME- OR COMMUNITY-BASED CARE**

48% OF LOCAL PROGRAMS reported having a documented **WAITING LIST FOR HOME-DELIVERED MEALS**

85% OF LOCAL PROGRAMS surveyed saw at least some **UNMET NEED IN THEIR COMMUNITIES**

If more investments are not made in aging and nutrition services as the older adult population rapidly grows, the unmet need will intensify, and the issues of senior hunger and isolation will escalate in the years to come.

12,000 AMERICANS
ARE TURNING 60 EACH DAY



By 2060, **1 IN 3** AMERICANS ARE
PROJECTED TO BE **60 AND OLDER**

Projected number of seniors by year:

77M 2020

93M 2030

118M 2060

The Older Americans Act (OAA) is the primary piece of federal legislation supporting the social and nutritional needs of seniors, caregivers and their families.



OAA services, like congregate and home-delivered meals, aim to serve groups of older adults living in the community with the **GREATEST SOCIAL OR ECONOMIC NEED**, such as those who:

- have low income;
- are a racial or ethnic minority;
- live in a rural community;
- have limited English proficiency; and/or
- are put at risk of institutionalization

The OAA Nutrition Program is the only federally supported program designed to meet the nutritional and social needs of older adults.

Established under the OAA 50 years ago, in 1972, the **TITLE III-C NUTRITION PROGRAM** aims to:

- reduce hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition;
- promote socialization; and
- improve the health and well-being of older adults

by assisting them in **GAINING ACCESS TO NUTRITION** and other **DISEASE PREVENTION** and health promotion services and delaying the onset of adverse health conditions

**MEALS PROVIDED THROUGH
THE OAA NUTRITION PROGRAM
ARE DESIGNED TO MEET THE
UNIQUE NUTRITION AND
HEALTH REQUIREMENTS OF
OLDER ADULTS, AND MEALS
ARE OFTEN TAILORED TO MEET
SPECIFIC MEDICAL NEEDS AND
CULTURAL PREFERENCES**



The OAA Nutrition Program offers home-delivered meals as well as congregate nutrition services at sites like senior centers – which provide more mobile seniors the opportunity to socially connect.

Frequent interactions with program volunteers and staff offer unique opportunities to meet nutritional needs, combat social isolation, address safety hazards and provide holistic care, all of which enable recipients to remain safer, healthier and more independent in their homes and communities.

223 MILLION MEALS WERE PROVIDED TO 2.4 MILLION OLDER ADULTS THROUGH THE OAA NUTRITION PROGRAM IN 2019

	HOME-DELIVERED	CONGREGATE
Meals served	149,974,193	73,337,377
Seniors served	883,586	1,508,422
SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND DEMOGRAPHIC FACTORS OF MEAL RECIPIENTS		
Are 75 or older	58.3%	57.1%
Are women	65.7%	66.6%
Live alone	58.1%	43.0%
Are veterans	15.1%	17.4%
Live in rural areas	29.1%	36.0%
HEALTH OF MEAL RECIPIENTS		
Report fair or poor health	56.3%	27.4%
Take 3+ medications daily	85.9%	69.6%
Report 3+ medical conditions	93.2%	86.7%
HUNGER AND FOOD SECURITY STATUS OF MEAL RECIPIENTS*		
Could not afford to eat balanced meals	45.3%	23.8%
Food bought did not last and did not have money to get more	41.0%	19.6%
RACE AND ETHNICITY OF MEAL RECIPIENTS		
Are Hispanic or Latino	7.0%	7.6%
Are Black or African American	16.3%	11.7%
Are American Indian or Alaskan Native	0.9%	1.1%
Are Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander	0.1%	0.1%
Are Asian	0.3%	3.5%
Are White or Caucasian	71.3%	73.6%
Are some other race	1.1%	0.3%
Are two or more races	3.0%	2.0%

*(Report that sometimes or often in the past 12 months...)

FOR MANY HOME-DELIVERED MEAL RECIPIENTS, THE PERSON DELIVERING THE MEAL IS OFTEN THE ONLY PERSON THEY WILL SEE THAT DAY

RESULTS OF PARTICIPATING IN THE OAA NUTRITION PROGRAM:

	HOME-DELIVERED	CONGREGATE
RECIPIENTS SAY MEALS...		
Make up about half or more of food they eat	61.0%	54.9%
Help improve their health	84.3%	69.0%
Help them eat healthier foods	82.9%	70.8%
RECIPIENTS SAY SERVICES HELP THEM...		
Live independently	84.3%	81.7%
Feel more secure	85.0%	76.8%
Care for self	83.0%	75.4%

**88% OF
HOME-DELIVERED
MEAL RECIPIENTS
SAY MEALS HELP
THEM STAY IN
THEIR OWN HOME**

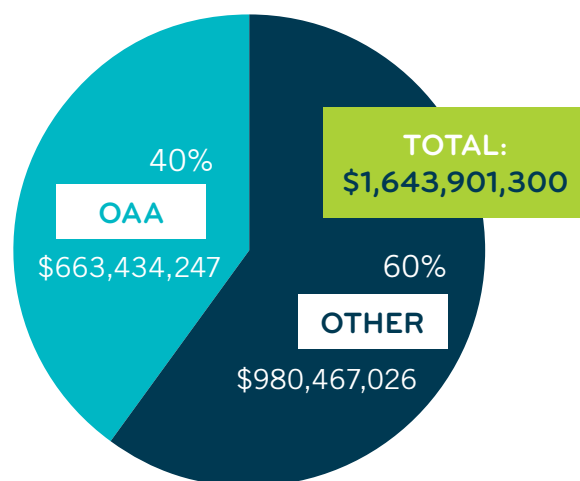


The OAA Nutrition Program is a successful public-private partnership and receives the largest portion of federal funding appropriated for programs through the OAA.

Funding sources for local senior nutrition programs vary based on the needs and resources of each community and can be obtained from a diverse range of federal, state, local and private dollars, generating a powerful social and economic return on investment for older adults and taxpayers alike.

Nationally, **THE OAA FUNDS 40% OF THE TOTAL COST TO PROVIDE NUTRITION SERVICES**; the other 60% of funding that serves seniors each year comes from state and/or local sources, private donations from foundations, corporations and individuals, and federal block grants

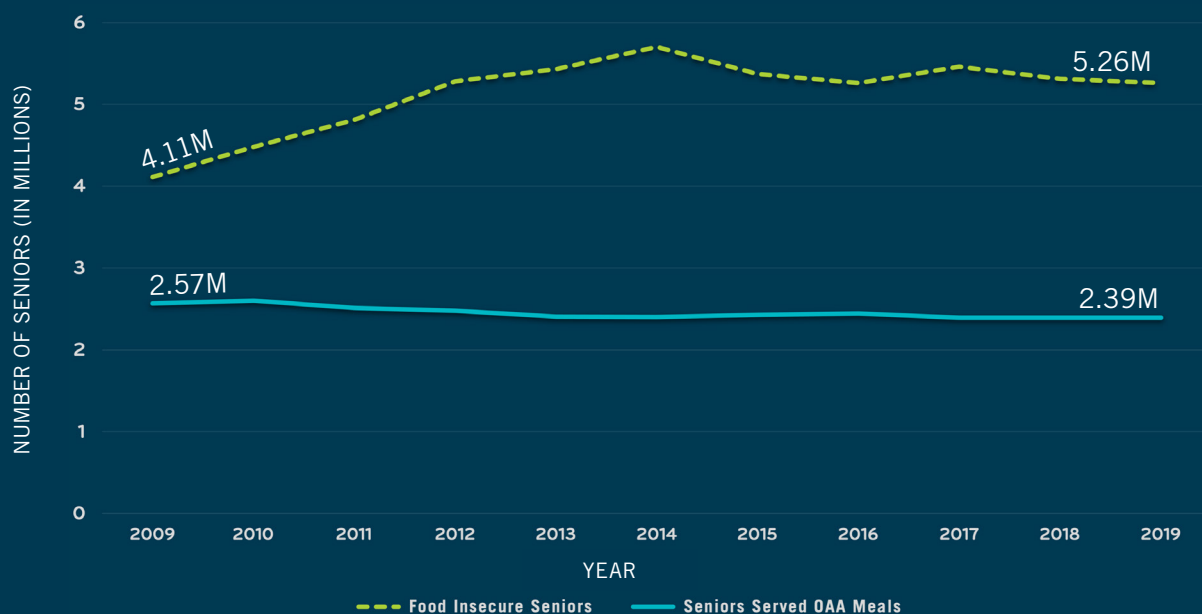
EXPENDITURES FOR OAA TITLE III-C NUTRITION SERVICES, 2019



Leading up to the pandemic, programs were serving a smaller portion of the total senior population, and inflation alone had steadily reduced buying power of federal funding over time.

BEFORE THE PANDEMIC:

THE SENIOR POPULATION STRUGGLING WITH HUNGER HAD INCREASED WHILE FEWER SENIORS HAD RECEIVED OAA NUTRITION SERVICES



Amid COVID-19, the OAA Nutrition Program has served as a lifeline for older adults and their families as the need and demand for nutrition and socialization services have skyrocketed along with operating expenses for community-based nutrition programs.

Due to persistent pandemic-related challenges, it is likely that Meals on Wheels programs will continue to serve a greater number of older adults, and costs to safely deliver meals are expected to remain high.



At their highest numbers served during the pandemic, programs reported serving an average of about **100% MORE HOME-DELIVERED MEALS** and serving home-delivered meals to **84% MORE SENIORS WEEKLY** than they were before the pandemic began

82% OF LOCAL PROGRAMS agreed, **"NEW CLIENTS ARE HERE TO STAY"**

88% OF LOCAL PROGRAMS SAID COSTS HAD INCREASED due to purchase of personal protective equipment and safety supplies, meal production expenses and/or labor costs

96% OF LOCAL PROGRAMS predicted that **FOOD AND PRODUCTION COSTS WOULD REMAIN HIGH**

Emergency COVID-19 funding provided through the OAA Nutrition Program helped local Meals on Wheels programs serve a lot more seniors during an unprecedented time, but more support is needed to meet the existing need and avoid scaling back or discontinuing service.



(November 2020)

86% OF LOCAL PROGRAMS

said there was **UNMET NEED FOR HOME-DELIVERED MEALS IN THEIR COMMUNITY**



(November 2020)

29% OF LOCAL PROGRAMS

said they would need to nearly double or more than double their home-delivered efforts to **SERVE THE UNMET NEED FOR HOME-DELIVERED MEALS IN THEIR COMMUNITY**



(July 2021)

48% OF LOCAL PROGRAMS

said they would **NOT BE ABLE TO SUPPORT THEIR CURRENT CLIENT BASE** without continued increased funding



(November 2020)

74% OF LOCAL PROGRAMS

believed they would **LOSE THE FINANCIAL SUPPORT** but keep the clients



(December 2020)

71% OF ADULTS

said **SUPPORTING PROGRAMS LIKE MEALS ON WHEELS** is “more important” in the wake of COVID-19



(December 2020)

72% OF ADULTS

felt the **FEDERAL OR STATE GOVERNMENT SHOULD HELP FUND** services like Meals on Wheels

With greater federal investments in the OAA Nutrition Program, senior nutrition programs across the country will be enabled to continue expanded operations, address current gaps in services and grow to meet the future needs of older adults in the years to come.

