

BUDGET FACT SHEET

Senior Hunger – A Policy Embarrassment

REQUEST

Provide an additional \$17 million to increase funding for senior nutrition programs. The added dollars would provide for an extra 2 million meals per year, and serve over 12,500 older Californians.

HUNGER AMONG OLDER ADULTS IS A POLICY EMBARRASMENT

Over the last ten years, the percentage of the senior population age 60 and older that faces food insecurity has increased by 45% (Ziliak & Gunderson, 2015). Incredibly, studies show that the percent of older adults in California facing the threat of hunger is 16.33%. California has the eleventh highest rate of senior food insecurity in the nation (United Heath Foundation, 2015).

Food insecurity is linked to poor health status (Stuff et al, 2004) and malnutrition. Malnutrition can lead to loss of weight and strength, greater susceptibility to disease, confusion, diabetes, osteoporosis, stroke, and cancer (World Health Organization, 2015). Malnutrition also leads to increased visits to emergency rooms, increased lengths of hospital days, and discharges to higher levels of care (Charlton et al, 2012).

HUNGER NEEDS TO BE ADDRESSED

California is home to some 7.8 million older adults (California State Plan on Aging 2017-2021). In California, the percent of older persons facing the threat of hunger is 16.33 %. Subsequently, nearly 1.274 million adults over the age of 60 are considered food insecure.

No one in California should go hungry, especially our parents and grandparents. Forty percent of older Californians do not have sufficient incomes to make ends meet. About 50% of older persons suffer from malnutrition. Over one million are threatened by hunger each day. It is essential to provide a safety net of preventive nutrition that enables older adults to age well.

THE BASICS OF SENIOR NUTRITION PROGRAMS

Nutrition programs serve numerous seniors through home delivered meals and congregate sites. Congregate sites reach out to low-income persons, those seeking social programs as well as the hidden homeless in the streets or in cars. Home delivered meal programs focuses on the home-bound, socially isolated, and most needy.

Home delivered meals are provided to older adults who are shut in and unable to get out of the house to go to a meal site. These seniors tend to be older, poorer and have multiple chronic conditions and suffer from isolation and loneliness. Nearly 11 million home-delivered meals are served annually - providing life-sustaining nutrition for some 55,000 older, frail Californians. Total cost of home delivered meals is about \$79 million with federal and state dollars of nearly \$39 million. On average, a recipient of home delivered meals receives 4 meals a week.

Congregate meals provide an opportunity for socialization (critical to health and well-being) and connection to community resources and social programs for those who attend. Congregate meals are provided in communal settings at various community-based sites. The positive impact of congregate meal programs is especially evident among the low-income respondents and those living alone. Approximately 7 million congregate meals are served every year to some 168,000 recipients. Total cost of the congregate meal program is about \$98.6 million with federal and state dollars contributing some \$54 million.

INCREASING NEED AMID FLAT FUNDING

Resolving the problem of 1.274 million older adults facing food insecurity is an enormous task. The task grows bigger considering that funding for nutrition has not been adjusted for the past 8 years.

Although approximately 223,000 seniors receive meals each year, over 1.051 million older Californians still face hunger every day. Attempting to feed those seniors not currently receiving meals would cost a whopping \$1.39 billion per year.

California can provide aggressive leadership in battling senior hunger by augmenting existing programs with an additional \$17 million for senior nutrition programs. These added dollars would provide for an additional 2 million meals per year, and serve over 12,500 new seniors with an average of three times per week for about \$8.50 per meal.

STATE FUNDING IS A CRITICAL PIECE OF A REAL SOLUTION

Home-delivered Meals and Congregate Dining Centers provide real solutions to two key issues facing seniors; they combat hunger and food insecurity, and have the added advantage of reducing loneliness and isolation.

California's leadership can provide the momentum for local communities, private individuals and foundations to join forces in this battle and augment the state funding with additional resources to address this overwhelming crisis. Socially isolated seniors are often silent and even invisible to the general public, but their lack of visibility does not end their hunger. Nutritious meals improve health and sustain life. Food is easier to provide and more cost-effective than hospitalizations or placement in a skilled nursing facility, and improves the quality of life for our older adults and their children and grandchildren. A budget augmentation to Senior Nutrition Programs will send a clear message that California prioritizes promoting health and well-being for all ages, rather than hospitalization, institutionalization, or other drastic and more costly interventions.

The budget request is co-sponsored by the California Association of Area Agencies on Aging, California Commission on Aging, and the Congress of California Seniors. It is supported by numerous aging organizations, including Meals on Wheels California, and the California Collaborative for LTSS.

