

Power Up Your Congregate Program: A Welcoming Environment

Hosted Wednesday, February 8, 2023

by the Office of Nutrition and Health Promotion Programs, Administration for Community Living (ACL),
and the National Council on Aging (NCOA)

Speakers: Stacy Dye, RDI Sightline; Peaches Hall, Director, Doris Griffin Senior Center; Bob Gurecki, Food Service Coordinator, SAGE Edie Windsor Center; Michael Beck, Chief Production Officer, Meals on Wheels Southwest Ohio & Northern Kentucky

[Go to recording on NCOA website](#)

Free registration/sign-in is required to access event materials.

Research Findings

Many congregate programs report higher numbers of female participants than male. Understanding why older males attend congregate meal programs is critical to building a sustainable program that serves older adults effectively. The following congregate meal findings were revealed in a recent telephone survey of over 600 men and women aged 60+ in Ohio and Kentucky:

- Males are significantly less likely to be aware of senior centers and senior center activities in their area than females.
- Word-of-mouth is the top source of awareness of meal programs for both men and women, followed by in-person visits to the senior center and actual participation.
- Males are significantly less likely to attend a meal program in the future than females.
- A welcoming atmosphere and the quality and nutritional value of meals are the most important attributes of a meal program to both men and women.
- Primary social groups of older adults consist of friends, children, spouses, and neighbors. Men are significantly more likely to mention their spouse and co-workers/former co-workers, while women are significantly more likely to mention friends, children, and grandchildren.
- Men are more likely to mention they rely on their spouse, or even that they have “no one,” when they have concerns or worries, and women are much more likely to rely on friends or children for support.

Ways to Engage Men

- Meet men where they are, literally and figuratively. Find out where they are meeting and talk to them. Ask them what they want and how they feel.
- Intentionally invite men to attend programs. Ideally, the invitation should come from another older man, but extending the invitation is what is most important.
- Give men the opportunity to give back. Enlist their support with promoting the program to other men.
- Seek input from men on programs and services offered. Let them pick and choose when and how they want to participate.

Suggested Activities and Programs

- Use food trucks in non-traditional congregate meal locations where men are already gathering (e.g., parks, recreational areas, hardware stores).

- Offer restaurant and coffee shop congregate meal locations to use the existing organic networks of older men already meeting there.
- Develop a marketing campaign to reach older men in partnership with local sports and talk radio.
- Host tailgate parties using a food truck.
- Consider partnering with programs like [Men's Shed](#) to enable communication among men and promote a feeling of self-worth by helping others.
- Offer programming specifically for men.