



The Elderly Nutrition Program

With the aging of the U.S. population, increased attention is being given to delivering health and related services to older persons in the community. Since adequate nutrition is critical to health, functioning, and the quality of life, it is an important component of home and community-based services for older people.

The Administration on Aging's (AoA) Elderly Nutrition Program provides grants to support nutrition services to older people throughout the country. The Elderly Nutrition Program, authorized under Title III, Grants for State and Community Programs on Aging, and Title VI, Grants for Native Americans, under the Older Americans Act, is intended to improve the dietary intakes of participants and to offer participants opportunities to form new friendships and to create informal support networks.

The Elderly Nutrition Program provides for congregate and home-delivered meals. These meals and other nutrition services are provided in a variety of settings, such as senior centers, schools, and in individual homes.

Meals served under the program must provide at least one-third of the daily-recommended dietary allowances established by the Food and Nutrition Board of the National Academy of Sciences-National Research Council. In practice, the Elderly Nutrition Program's 3.1 million elderly participants are receiving an estimated 40 to 50 percent of most required nutrients.

The Elderly Nutrition Program also provides a range of related services, by some of the aging network's estimated 4,000 nutrition service providers, including nutrition screening, assessment, education and counseling. These services help older participants to identify their general and special nutrition needs, as they may relate to health concerns such as hypertension and diabetes.

The services help older participants to learn to shop for, and/or to plan and prepare, meals that are economical and which help to manage or ameliorate specific health problems as well as enhancing their health and well-being. The congregate meal programs also provide older people with positive social contacts with other seniors at the group meal sites.

Volunteers who deliver meals to older persons who are homebound are encouraged to spend some time with the elderly. The volunteers also offer an important opportunity to check on the welfare of the homebound elderly and are encouraged to report any health or other problems that they may note during their visits.

In addition to providing nutrition and nutrition-related services, the Elderly Nutrition Program provides an important link to other needed supportive in-home and community-based services such as homemaker-home health aide services, transportation, fitness programs, and even home repair and home modification programs.

Eligibility

While there is no means test for participation in the Elderly Nutrition Program, services are targeted to older people with the greatest economic or social need, with special attention given to low-income minorities.

In addition to focusing on low-income and other older persons at risk of losing their independence, the following individuals may receive service including:

- A spouse of any age;
- Disabled persons under age 60 who reside in housing facilities occupied primarily by the elderly where congregate meals are served;
- Disabled persons who reside at home and accompany older persons to meals; and
- Nutrition service volunteers.

Since American Indians, Alaskan Natives, and Native Hawaiians tend to have lower life expectancies and higher rates of illness at younger ages, Tribal Organizations are given the option of setting the age at which older people can participate in the program.

Program Outcomes

A congressionally-mandated evaluation of the Elderly Nutrition Program, released in fiscal year (FY) 1996, found that its participants have higher daily intakes of key nutrients than similar nonparticipants and that they have more social contacts as a result of the program.

Among Elderly Nutrition Program participants, 80 to 90 percent have incomes below 200 percent of the Department of Health and Human Services' poverty level index, which is twice the rate for the overall elderly population. More than twice as many Title III participants live alone; and two-thirds of participants are either over or under their desired weight, placing them at risk for nutrition and health problems. Title III home-delivered meals participants have twice as many physical impairments compared with the overall elderly population.

For every \$1 of federal congregate funds, \$1.70 additional funding is leveraged; for every \$1 of federal home-delivered funds, \$3.35 additional funding is leveraged. The leveraged funds come from other sources including state, tribal, local, and other federal moneys and

services, as well as through donations from participants. Nationally, total contributions amounted to \$170 million.

The average cost of a meal, including the value of donated labor and supplies, was \$5.17 for a group meal and \$5.31 for a home-delivered meal under Title III. Comparable costs for a meal under Title VI were \$6.19 and \$7.18, respectively.

Resources

Your Area Agency on Aging is listed in the government section of the phone directory usually under "aging" or "elderly" services. The AAA can provide information about the Elderly Nutrition Program in your area. If you are unable to locate your AAA or for information about AAA's in other areas of the nation, please call the AoA's Eldercare Locator at **1-800-677-1116**. It is helpful if you can provide the address and zip code of the older person you are trying to assist.

Working in close partnership with its sister agencies in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the AoA is the official Federal agency dedicated to policy development, planning and the delivery of supportive home and community-based services to older persons and their caregivers.

The AoA works through the national aging network of 56 State Units on Aging, 655 Area Agencies on Aging, 236 Tribal and Native organizations representing 300 American Indian and Alaska Native Tribal organizations, and two organizations serving Native Hawaiians, plus thousands of service providers, adult care centers, caregivers, and volunteers. For more information about the AoA, please contact:



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