

Nutrition—A Critical Service

Adequate nutrition is essential for healthy aging, the prevention or delay of chronic disease and disease-related disabilities, and for improved quality of life. Yet poor nutrition is a major problem for older adults. Almost 90 percent have a nutrition-related chronic disease or condition such as diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure, or osteoporosis. About 40 percent of community dwelling older adults as well as their caregivers have inadequate food and nutrient intake, which affects their health and ability to function independently.

The Older Americans Act (OAA) Nutrition Program is intended to meet these needs. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration on Aging (AoA), provides grants to support nutrition services to older adults and their caregivers throughout the country. The purposes of these programs are to improve health, improve dietary intakes, offer participants opportunities to form new friendships, create informal support systems, and link participants to other health and supportive services.

The OAA Nutrition Program provides for congregate and home-delivered meals, also known as Meals-On-Wheels. Other services include nutrition screening, assessment, education, and counseling. Linkages to health promotion and disease prevention programs as well as physical activity programs are also critical. These meals and other nutrition services are

provided in a variety of settings, such as senior centers, schools, and individual homes.

Congregate nutrition services improve participants' health and prevent more costly interventions. Home-delivered nutrition services enable older adults to avoid or delay costly institutionalization and allow them to stay in their homes and communities.

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

Program Highlights

- The cost of a one-year supply of home-delivered meals equals about the cost of one day in the hospital.
- OAA nutrition programs supply approximately 50 percent of total nutrient intake in a single day.
- OAA nutrition program participants have more social interaction than those who do not participate in AoA meal programs.

Data

- State data for FY 2001 indicate that approximately 112 million congregate meals were served to 1.8 million older adults with a total expenditure of \$589.9 million.
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FACT SHEET

Nutrition...cont'd.

- approximately 143.4 million home-delivered meals were served to about one million homebound older adults with a total expenditure of \$595.7 million.
- Both congregate and home-delivered nutrition services successfully target adults who are older, poorer, sicker, and more likely to live alone, live in rural areas, and be minorities.
 - Recipients of home-delivered meals are typically older persons who live alone, have incomes below \$10,000, and have multiple chronic health conditions.
 - Forty-eight percent of home-delivered meals participants and 26 percent of congregate participants have spent time in a hospital or nursing home in the past year.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration on Aging (AoA), works with a nationwide network of organizations and service providers to make support services and resources available to older persons and their caregivers. For more information about the AoA, please contact: **the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration on Aging**, Washington, DC 20201, Phone 202-619-0724, e-mail aoainfo@aoa.gov, Web site: www.aoa.gov

