



Mid-Columbia Meal on Wheels serves seniors in Benton and Franklin Counties

older adults to avoid or delay costly institutionalization and allow them to stay in their homes and communities. Recipients of home-delivered meals are typically older persons living alone, have annual incomes below \$11,000, and have multiple chronic health conditions.

Adequate nutrition is essential for healthy aging and the prevention or delay of chronic disease and disease-related disabilities. The cost of a one-year supply of home-delivered meals equals about the cost of one day in the hospital.



Seniors enjoy a nutritious lunch

7. NUTRITION SERVICES:

The Congregate Meal Program successfully targets seniors who are older, low income, and more likely to live alone, live in rural areas, be minorities, and be medically vulnerable. The meal programs are offered in community centers, churches, and sites such as Grange Halls. Congregate nutrition services improve the health of participants and prevent more costly interventions. The congregate meal programs also provide older people with positive social contacts at the group meal sites and physical activity programs.

Home-delivered nutrition services enable

In 2008 the Older Americans Act (OAA) nutrition program served 6.8% of the entire senior population in Southeast Washington. Home delivered and congregate meals are an important part of the weekly nutrition for seniors in our PSA.

The need for adequate food and nutrition services by at-risk older adults currently exceeds the resources of the existing programs. Funding has yet to keep up with the demand of the growing senior population.

As well, national funding sources have not kept pace as food, transportation, and labor

costs continue to rise. Currently, several of our nutrition contractors are faced with dilemma of finding ways to best serve our aging population with less funding. They are looking at many cost-saving measures, like: cutting back on the number of days that hot meals can be delivered or served; eliminating meal sites, and moving meal sites that are located in Senior Centers to locations that better serve our targeted populations.

SE/ALTC's service area has high poverty levels, large populations of limited English speaking clientele, and individuals with less than a 12th grade education. To adequately serve these populations, there must be adequate education about nutrition. This information needs to be disseminated in multiple languages and through multiple media.



Senior Farmers Market program participants choose from an abundance of fruits and vegetables in Walla Walla

SENIOR MARKET BASKET:

The Senior Market Basket program provides nutrition related educational materials including recipes, nutrient values, food preparation and storage information. Additional resources in the form of fresh, nutritious, locally grown fruits, vegetables, and herbs from farmers' markets and roadside stands were provided to low-income seniors. Seniors can get produce three ways: homebound seniors will have it delivered, along with their home-delivered meals, people who eat at senior meal sites can pick up produce at these sites, or seniors can purchase produce at farmers markets using vouchers. There is no cost to the senior for the program.

Low-income seniors are defined as individuals who are at least 60 years old and who have household incomes of not more than 185% of the federal poverty income guidelines (published each year by the Department of Health and Human Services). For 2007 this amount was \$1,575 for a single person and \$2,111 for a couple.

In 2007 1,428 seniors received vouchers and 224 received home-delivered baskets of fresh produce for a total of over \$65,300 in produce.

ISSUES RELATED TO NUTRITION:

With the OAA passing in September 2006, SE/ALTC has the opportunity to continue serving the senior population. However, our Public Service Area (PSA) has had challenges with increased fuel and transportation costs. With much of our region being rural (38%), ensuring equal access to our services has been expensive. A forum participant remarked, "Our rural areas have few transportation options, none of which offer transport to meal sites."

Southeast Washington is rich in diversity. This challenges providers to integrate seniors of ethnic backgrounds with meals sites that have not historically been very ethnically diverse. There is the challenge of meal planning to accommodate all tastes and textures and overcoming social barriers that are further complicated by the inability for different language groups to communicate fluently with one another. Often, these challenges have been addressed by creating ethnic meal sites.

Nutrition providers are making some very difficult decisions. There has already been a reduction of the number of days congregate

meals are served in some areas and closing of some meals sites, which include ethnic meal sites, where a lower volume of clientele may come.

As home delivery meals serves the most vulnerable population, SE/ALTC has made this a priority. According to nutrition providers, home delivered meals are much more costly than congregate meals due to transportation costs and the limited numbers of volunteers to deliver meals. Providers also indicate that individuals receiving home delivered meals donate at a much lower rate than for Congregate Meals, thereby reducing the number of meals that may be served.

Nutrition providers are making efforts to educate seniors on nutritional health and physical activity. Presentations are conducted at the congregate sites by the nutrition provider at least twice a year. Most senior centers offer some kind of physical activity session once or twice a week.

GOAL: SE/ALTC will work to address the nutritional wellbeing of seniors and disabled persons by supporting nutrition programs and advocate to enhance public awareness and support of the benefits of nutritional wellbeing for older and/or disabled persons.

OBJECTIVES:

- SE/ALTC will work with nutrition contractors to address the reduction in funding, making home delivered meals first priority, and to determine changes in service that will provide the greatest benefit to vulnerable adults. *Spring and fall of each year.*

- SE/ALTC will coordinate with the nutrition contractors to develop strategies to improve the nutritional health of the vulnerable rural senior population including a large Hispanic population. RD home visits will be conducted when necessary or as requested by the participant. **Ongoing**
- SE/ALTC will encourage nutrition contractors to continuously recruit volunteers for meal delivery and congregate sites. **Ongoing**
- SE/ALTC will share with nutrition providers and expand distribution of nutritional materials designed to educate seniors and the general population on good nutritional health **Ongoing**
- SE/ALTC will participate in transportation meetings throughout the PSA to strategize on methods that will assist with coordination of transportation to meal sites for seniors who live in rural areas where transport services are not available. **Ongoing**
- SE/ALTC will sponsor semiannual nutrition contractors meetings, providing technical assistance and exploring where SE/ALTC can provide assistance and will develop contingency plans in conjunction with contractors. **Spring and fall of each year**
- SE/ALTC and the Kittitas County Advisory Board will strongly encourage contractors to provide at least five hot meals to seniors weekly, wherever feasible at each meal site. **2010**
- SE/ALTC will encourage contractors to have their staff attend trainings and conferences as it relates to the nutrition program in order to be advocates of good health and wellbeing. SE/ALTC will provide training information throughout the year as it is available. **Ongoing**
- SE/ALTC will continue to advocate for additional funds to continue the Farmers Market program. The Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program (SFMNP) voucher process is modeled after the WIC voucher program. SE/ALTC nutrition contractors will utilize (SFMNP) vouchers for purchases. **Ongoing**



Seniors enjoying the Yakima Pioneer Picnic