

C- 5b. 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 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 \$14,000 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.

In 2014 the Older Americans Act (OAA) nutrition program served 4% 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 implemented cost-saving measures that include: 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.

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.

Some meal sites cut back on days of service temporarily at congregate meal sites to continue serving the home bound senior with the limited funds available.

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 2015 this amount was \$1,815 for a single person and \$2,457 for a married couple. In 2014, 2,052 seniors received vouchers for a total of over \$79,215 in produce.

ISSUES RELATED TO NUTRITION:

With the OAA passing in September 2006, 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, volunteer drivers are needed to take home delivered meals or fill the transportation gap and offer a ride to a meal site."

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 have had to make some difficult decisions in the past as funding decreased. There has 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. There has been a decrease in the number of hot home delivered meals that are able to be served.

As home delivered meals serves the most vulnerable population, 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: 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:

- ALTC will work with nutrition contractors to address the reduction in funding, making hot 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.*
- ALTC will work with nutrition contractors to maintain or increase the number of hot delivered meals especially to rural areas where delivery has been cut over the past years. *January 2016 – December 2019*
- 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. *January 2016 – December 2019*
- ALTC will encourage nutrition contractors to continuously recruit volunteers for delivery of home delivered meals and service at congregate sites. *January 2016 – December 2019*

- 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. *January 2016 – December 2019*
- 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. ALTC nutrition contractors will utilize (SFMNP) vouchers for purchases. *January 2016 – December 2019*
- ALTC will encourage contractors to seek out, within their communities, additional funding and/or partnership or via grants for fiscal support and to continue operating the senior nutrition program to its capacity. SE/ALTC will forward applications for grants when available. *January 2016 – December 2019*



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Client Stories

Pedro, an 81 year old veteran and former Hanford worker, was born and raised in the Yakima Valley. He relies on the Meals on Wheels program for his nutritional health as he is unable to cook for himself due to a number of health and mobility issues. Pedro receives seven meals a week from People For People's Meals on Wheels program. He says, "Meals on Wheels provides nutritious hot meals that I wouldn't otherwise be able to prepare for myself." He appreciates the daily visits with the friendly volunteer drivers, "The drivers and other employees are very nice and friendly people. They are always willing to listen and help when you need help." Pedro also receives pet food assistance for his feline family members. He is very grateful for the support that allows him to remain healthy and independent.

Joy, a retired nurse whose health issues keeps her housebound and limits her ability to stand for any length of time, benefits from our home delivery program. Creating a hot meal in her own kitchen is almost impossible, so Meals on Wheels is an important part of her retaining her independence. Joy says the meals are good, but what she likes best is that the always busy drivers make a point to share conversation every time they come. "They are all so down to earth and good-hearted. They always take a few moments to chat and sometimes go beyond the call of duty!"