



The Case for Increased Funding for Senior Nutrition Services in Alaska

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Abstract

The Alaska Food Coalition (AFC) has worked to strengthen and coordinate public and private food and nutrition assistance programs in Alaska since 2001. In 2010, AFC prioritized advocating for increased funding for senior nutrition services. Over 20% of Alaskans age 65 or older have incomes below 175% of the federal poverty level in Alaska; \$23,678 for a single senior, and \$31,868 for a couple.ⁱ A 2010 Alaska Commission on Aging (ACoA) survey of seniors 65+ found that 20% of those surveyed said no when asked if their monthly income was enough to meet their monthly expenses.ⁱⁱ These seniors often live with the reality of having to choose between paying for food, heat or medicine. The need for food and nutrition services for the senior population is growing faster than the resources currently provided for by private and government programs.

It is the position of AFC that the health and well being of our seniors is largely dependent upon full or expanded funding of senior nutrition services for low income seniors. Adequate food and nutrition services are essential and critical components to a healthy lifestyle. For seniors, access to food nutrition services contributes to a healthy lifestyle and decreases vulnerability to chronic disease, depression and conditions that limits their ability to live independently in their homes and communities. Continued funding, and ultimately expansion of nutrition programs will contribute to the overall quality of life for those seniors who depend on these services, and the communities they live in.

Statement of Need

For seniors, poverty is the leading cause of hunger; living alone is another risk factorⁱⁱⁱ. Older Americans faced with hunger are more likely to report poor health, live at or below the poverty level, and be divorced, separated or living in a household with a grandchild.

- 4,023 Alaskans 60+ living below the poverty level in 2009, 4.93% of the total 60+ population.^{iv}
- 29% of all Adult Public Assistance recipients (2009) in Alaska 60+ received an average monthly benefit of \$277.91, and
- During the month of November 2010, the Alaska Department of Public Assistance recorded 4,557 residents age 60+ and 2,524 age 65+ participating in the food stamp program.^v

According to the Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development (ADLWD), Alaska's population age 65+ is expected to grow at its highest rate during 2006 to 2030. ADLWD estimates the 65+ population will triple in size over the next 25 years.

- 2010: 45,489 Alaska Residents 65+
- 2030: 134,391(estimated) Alaska Residents 65+^{vi}

There were 10,109 Senior Benefits recipients in 2010, each receiving a cash supplement ranging from \$125 to \$250 per month, based on incomes below 175% of the federal poverty level.^{vii} Senior populations in several Alaska regions have grown rapidly in the past eight years (The South Central Alaska senior population has increased by nearly 72%); all nine regions have witnessed an increase in their senior populations of at least 20% during this time period.^{viii}

A Feeding America 2010 hunger study conducted by the Alaska Food Coalition and Food Bank of Alaska found:

- 42% of adult pantry and kitchen clients in Alaska were 50-64
- 8.5% 65+

Of those currently 65+, 57.8% said they experienced low or very low food security.^{ix} A 2008 study conducted by Meals on Wheels estimates in 2025, 9.5 million senior Americans will experience some form of food insecurity, almost double the number from 2005. In 2025, an estimated 3.9 million senior Americans will be at-risk of hunger and over 1 million senior Americans will suffer from hunger.^x Alaska's seniors need our help; we can end senior hunger by advocating for continued and full funding of senior nutrition program.

Older Americans Act Nutrition Programs

Senior Nutrition Services in Alaska are primarily funded under the U.S. Older Americans Act Nutrition Program, the largest single component of the Older Americans Act (OAA). Congress passed OAA in 1965 in response to concern about a lack of community social services for older persons. The federally funded OAA provides a variety of in-home and community-based services without cost to persons 60+. While people 60+ are eligible for OAA programs, services are funded for individuals with the greatest economic and social need who meet program guidelines. OAA is administered by the Administration on Aging (AoA). The OAA authorizes three different nutrition programs under Title III, Congregate Nutrition Services, Home-Delivered Nutrition Services and Nutrition Services Incentive Program.

Congregate Nutrition Services (Title III C1) and Home-Delivered Nutrition Services (Title III C2)

Congregate Nutrition Services, established in 1972 and Home Delivered Nutrition Services, established in 1978 provides meals and related nutrition services to seniors.^{xi} Congregate meals are provided at community centers in low-income areas, subsidized housing complexes, senior centers, schools, adult day care services and religious facilities. Home Delivered Nutrition Services provides meals and related nutrition services to seniors that are home bound.

Nutrition Services Incentive Program (NSIP)

The NSIP was established by the OAA in 1974 as the Nutrition Program for the Elderly within the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) for commodities only, and in 1977 for commodities or cash. The NSIP was transferred to AoA in 2003. NSIP provides additional funding to States, Territories and eligible Tribal organizations that is used exclusively to purchase food, and may not be used to pay for other nutrition-related services or for state or local administrative costs. States may choose to receive the grant as cash, commodities or a combination of cash and commodities.^{xii}

The AoA distributes Title III funds to states under a formula based largely on the number of people aged 60+ in each state. States with smaller populations of seniors, including Alaska, receive no less than one-half of one percent of the total Congressional appropriation. Each of nine regions in Alaska receive an allocation of funds based on the number of individuals 60+, and target populations (those with the greatest economic and social need) with specific weighting factors.^{xiii} The nine regions are Bethel, Interior, North Slope, Anchorage, South Central, Aleutians, Southwest, Northwest and Southeast.

In order for a state to receive Title III funds, the governor must designate a state agency as the sole agency on aging, and the state must develop a multi-year plan for services to seniors. In Alaska, the Department of Health and Social Services (HSS) is that agency, with the state plan development delegated to the Alaska Commission on Aging (ACoA). The Division of Senior and Disabilities Services (HSS) maintains responsibility for day-to-day administration and oversight of U.S. Administration on Aging (AoA) funded programs. States are required to provide a matching 15% in order to receive funds for congregate and home delivered meals. States are allowed to transfer allotted funds among the three programs^{xiv}. In 2009, the last year data was available, Home-Delivered Nutrition Services funded 28 providers in Alaska and served 2,638 people 305,179 meals. 7,970 Alaskans participated in 270,579 congregate meals served by 30 providers.^{xv}

Title VI of the Older Americans Act

Services for Native Americans programs were first established in 1978 with the provision of nutrition and supportive services, and in 2000 expanded with the addition of caregiver support services. Title VI provide grants to eligible Tribal organizations to promote the delivery of home and community-based supportive services, including nutrition services and support for family and informal caregivers to Native American, Alaskan Native and Native Hawaiian elders. Formula grants for the Services for Native Americans programs are allocated to Tribal organizations based on their share of the American Indian, Alaskan Native, and Native Hawaiian population aged 60 and over in their services area. To be eligible for funding, Tribal organizations of federally-recognized Tribes must represent at least 50 Native American elders age 60 and over. There is no requirement for matching funds. Separate formula grant awards are made for Nutrition and Supportive Services and Caregiver Support Services.^{xvi}

Alaska’s Funding History

The following is a breakdown of AoA funding received by Alaska from 2006-2010:

Service	<i>FY2006</i>	<i>FY2007</i>	<i>FY2008</i>	<i>FY2009</i>	<i>FY2010</i>
Congregate Nutrition Services	\$1,919,299	\$1,983,727	\$2,039,714	\$2,158,368	\$2,190,101
Home-Delivered Nutrition Services	\$906,082	\$936,395	\$962,745	\$1,065,886	\$1,081,558
Support Services	\$1,746,341	\$1,749,360	\$1,749,717	\$1,795,942	\$1,830,190
Preventative Services	\$106,594	\$106,779	\$105,130	\$105,130	\$105,130
National Family Caregiver Support Program	\$777,878	\$779,224	\$762,013	\$766,492	\$766,267

<i>Total Title III</i>	<i>\$5,456,194</i>	<i>\$5,555,485</i>	<i>\$5,619,319</i>	<i>\$5,891,818</i>	<i>\$5,973,246</i>
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2010 DHSS FY 2011 Operating Grants – Nutrition, Transportation and Support Services^{xvii} include a 15% match from the State of Alaska and funds distributed to Tribes through Title VI of the Older Americans Act:

<i>Agency</i>	<i>Region</i>	<i>Fed. Receipts</i>	<i>Gen. Fund</i>
Alaska Community Services, Inc	Statewide	\$ 79,394	\$ 27,896
Alaska Legal Services	Statewide	\$107,576	\$ 37,799
Aleknagik, City of	Bristol Bay/Kodiak	\$ 10,208	\$ 33,587
Anchor-Age Center, Inc.	Anchorage	\$ 29,085	\$ 10,220
Anchorage, Municipality of	Anchorage	\$195,015	\$377,235
Bristol Bay Native Association	Bristol Bay/Kodiak	\$106,110	\$ 27,283
Catholic Community Service	Southeast	\$692,655	\$243,365
Chugiak Senior Citizens, Inc.	Anchorage	\$103,548	\$ 36,383
Cordova Community Medical Center	Southcentral	\$ 57,089	\$ 20,089
Dillingham, City of	Bristol Bay/Kodiak	\$ 98,916	\$ 34,756
Homer Senior Citizens	Southcentral	\$124,522	\$ 43,753
Kenai, City of	Southcentral	\$114,044	\$ 56,180
Kuskokwim Native Association	Yukon/Kuskokwim	\$ 40,700	\$ 14,300
Maniilaq Association	Kotzebue/Norton Sd.	\$ 32,834	\$ 11,337
Metlakatla Indian Country	Southeast	\$ 44,369	\$ 15,590
Mid-Valley Seniors	Southcentral	\$ 62,805	\$ 22,067
Minto Village Council	Interior	\$ 49,489	\$ 3,875
Mountain View Food Services	Southeast	\$ 18,574	\$ 6,526
Native Village of White Mountain	Kotzebue/Norton Sd.	\$ 26,711	\$ 9,386
Nenana Tortella Council on Aging	Interior	\$ 82,523	\$ 28,997
Nikiski Senior Citizens, Inc.	Southcentral	\$ 14,889	\$ 5,231
Nome Community Center	Kotzebue/Norton Sd.	\$155,398	\$ 54,602
North Slope Borough	Northern	\$ 88,630	\$ 31,141
North Star Council on Aging, Inc.	Interior	\$232,278	\$106,047
Older Person's Action Group, Inc.	Statewide	\$ 83,841	\$ 29,459
Orutsaramiut Native Council	Yukon/Kuskokwim	\$ 68,339	\$ 24,012
Palmer Senior Citizens Center, Inc.	Southcentral	\$147,748	\$ 51,914
S. Army Older Alaskans Program	Anchorage	\$581,099	\$204,179
Seldovia, City of	Southcentral	\$ 27,627	\$ 9,707
Senior Citizens of Kodiak	Bristol Bay/Kodiak	\$160,310	\$ 56,327
Seward Senior Citizens	Southcentral	\$ 44,787	\$ 15,737
Soldotna Areal Senior Citizens, Inc.	Southcentral	\$ 80,373	\$ 28,240
Tanana Tribal Council	Interior	\$ 49,489	\$ 3,875
Unalaska Senior Citizens	Aleutians Islands	\$ 55,499	\$ 19,501
Upper Tanana Development Corp.	Interior	\$279,262	\$ 98,123
Valdez Senior Citizens Center, Inc.	Southcentral	\$ 31,329	\$ 11,008
Volunteers of America Alaska	Anchorage	\$ 38,850	\$ 13,650
Wasilla Area Seniors, Inc.	Southcentral	\$147,452	\$ 51,809
	Program Total:		\$ 6,230,852

The Future for Funding

When adjusted for inflation, the total amount of funding appropriated for OAA Nutrition Services to states has decreased substantially over the past two decades, \$819.5 million for FY2010 compared to \$941.7 million in FY 1990. Only the amount appropriated for home delivered meals increased in real terms from 1990 to 2008, rising from \$129.5 million to \$190.7 million, an increase of \$61.2 million or 47%. Current projections reflect a serious gap in services. A 7/16/10 New York Times article states since the start of the recession, 25 states have curtailed programs that include meal deliveries.^{xviii} For the first time in his administration, the President did not propose an increase in Title III nutrition programs funded for FY 2012. If funding is not allocated to adjust for inflation, seniors will be forced to make choices between paying for heat, transportation and medicine; the 2010 Feeding America Hunger Study documented seniors are already making these choices.

The ACoA creates a State Plan for Senior Services every 2 to 4 years, as a requirement of the Older Americans Act. The plan for FY2012 through FY2016 was submitted to the AoA in May and approved June 11, 2011.^{xix} The U.S. Congress will consider reauthorization and amendments to OAA effective in FY 2012. As part of efforts to develop the needs assessment for the state plan, the ACoA hosted six elder-senior community forums in Kotzebue, Anchorage, Fairbanks, Juneau, and Bethel with the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium Elders Committee. Additionally, the ACoA distributed a senior survey and senior provider survey to learn about the variety of issues related to aging in Alaska. More than 3,000 Alaskans age 50 and older completed the senior survey.^{xx}

Conclusion

Alaska's growing senior population presents both a challenge and an opportunity. From 1997 to 2007 Alaska's senior population grew faster than any other state in the U.S. Some of this can be attributed to the oil boom of the late 1970's. Many of those 20-year-olds who came to work here stayed, and today are 62. The senior population in Alaska is estimated to grow to over 100,000 by the year 2025, one eighth of the estimated total population of Alaska. In rural Alaska, elders are living longer and are less likely to have participated in Social Security due to subsistence lifestyles. These are our ancestors and our parents. Continued support for senior nutrition services will help our elders stay healthy, independent and a valuable resource to our communities.

The programs funded by the Older Americans Act outlined in this paper are for individuals with the greatest economic and social need. Adequate nutrition is critical to health, survival and quality of life. Homebound seniors depend on home delivered meal programs; many cannot transport a heavy box or bag of food to their residence. Elders are often unable to prepare food as they have in years past due to physical or mental limitations beyond their control. Congregate meals are not just a nutritional necessity for those living in senior housing or who have access to transportation; these meals provide a setting for social interaction and volunteer opportunities for elders who want to stay active. Furthermore, nutrition services provide support for over-burdened caregivers. These programs provide nutrition services to seniors with the greatest need. Advocating for full funding of senior nutrition programs is not only the right thing to do; it is a rite of passage.

Footnotes

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- ⁱ Senior Snapshot: Older Americans in 2010 <http://www.hss.state.ak.us/acoa/documents/Snapshot2010.pdf>
- ⁱⁱ Alaska Commission on Aging FY2010 Annual Report http://www.hss.state.ak.us/acoa/documents/ACOA_FY2010.pdf
- ⁱⁱⁱ Hunger in America Today, AARP http://www.aarp.org/giving-back/charitable-giving/info-11-2010/hungry_in_america_2010.2.html
- ^{iv} FY2009 Profile of Alaska OAA Programs Poverty Data
<http://www.agidnet.org/StateProfiles/Profile/Compare/PopulationData/Poverty/>
http://www.aoa.gov/AoARoot/Program_Results/SPR/2009/Index.aspx
- ^v Alaska Commission on Aging FY2010 Annual Report http://www.hss.state.ak.us/acoa/documents/ACOA_FY2010.pdf
- ^{vi} Alaska Department of Labor <http://www.laborstats.alaska.gov/pop/projected/pub/popproj0730.pdf>
- ^{vii} Senior Benefits Fact Sheet
<http://www.cathymunoz.com/file.axd?file=2011%2F1%2FSenior+Benefits+Program+Fact+Sheet.pdf>
- ^{viii} Alaska Commission on Aging Senior Snapshot Older Alaskans in 2010
<http://www.hss.state.ak.us/acoa/documents/Snapshot2010.pdf>
- ^{ix} Hunger in America Alaska Report http://www.foodbankofalaska.org/uploads/page/42/hunger_in_america_-_ak_report.pdf
- ^x Meals-On-Wheels “The Causes, Consequences and Future of Senior Hunger in America”, pg. 56
<http://www.mowaa.org/document.doc?id=13>
- ^{xi} Older Americans Act http://www.aoa.gov/aoaroot/aoa_programs/oaa/index.aspx
- ^{xii} Nutrition Services Incentive Program
http://www.aoa.gov/aoaroot/aoa_programs/hcltc/nutrition_services/index.aspx#nutritionservices
- ^{xiii} US Administration on Aging Nutrition Services
http://www.aoa.gov/AoARoot/AoA_Programs/HCLTC/Nutrition_Services/index.aspx
- ^{xiv} Congressional Research Service Report: Older Americans Act: Title iii Nutrition Services Program 2/1/10
<http://aging.senate.gov/crs/nutrition1.pdf>
- ^{xv} Administration on Aging Alaska Service Profile www.aoa.gov/aoaroot/program_results/SPR/2009/profiles/ak.xls
- ^{xvi} FY2010 Annual Title VI Parts A/B, C, and NSIP Tribal Awards
http://www.aoa.gov/aoaroot/aoa_programs/oaa/Aging_Network/State_Allocations/docs/FY2010TribalAwards.pdf
http://www.aoa.gov/aoa_programs/hcltc/native_americans/index.aspx
- Fiscal Year 2011 Alaska Department of Health and Social Services Operating Grants
http://dhss.alaska.gov/fms/Documents/FY11GrantBook_web.pdf
- ^{xvii} http://dhss.alaska.gov/fms/Documents/FY11GrantBook_web.pdf
- ^{xviii} New York Times 7/21/2010 http://www.nytimes.com/2010/07/21/us/21aging.html?_r=1&pagewanted=print
- ^{xix} http://www.hss.state.ak.us/acoa/documents/statePlanFinalFY12_FY15.pdf
- ^{xx} Alaska Commission on Aging FY2010 Annual Report http://www.hss.state.ak.us/acoa/documents/ACOA_FY2010.pdf