

The Wisconsin Senior Dining Program

Overview

The Elderly Nutrition Program is also referred to as the Wisconsin Senior Dining Program. The Senior Dining Program provides meals and other nutrition services to participants in every county of the state. Elderly persons are supplied with meals either delivered to their homes or served in a variety of congregate group settings, such as senior centers, community centers, faith-based settings, and schools. Home delivered meals are often called “Meals on Wheels”. Other services provided include nutrition screening, nutrition education, nutrition assessment and counseling services. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), Administration on Aging (AoA) program is funded through the 1972 Older Americans Act.

The Department of Health and Family Services administers the program in Wisconsin which seeks to improve participant nutrition and create social opportunities through the provision of meals and informal support networks. The legislative intent is to make nutrition and community-based services available to older adults at risk of losing their independence.

Eligibility

Elderly Nutrition Program services are available to anyone 60 years or older and their spouse, regardless of age. Provider agencies target services to seniors with the greatest nutritional, social and economic need. Participants are asked to contribute what they can afford to contribute toward the cost of the service; however no one is denied meals or nutrition services because of an inability to do so. Homebound seniors due to frailty or poor health must be interviewed by program staff to determine if they qualify to receive home-delivered meals.

Access/Participation

In 2006, the program served over 2.2 million meals to persons in approximately 600 community sites across Wisconsin. In addition, over 2.3 million home-delivered meals were provided to homebound Wisconsin seniors. In total 4.5 million meals were provided to Wisconsin seniors.

Benefit Details

Meals served under the program offer at least 33% of the Recommended Dietary Allowances for an older person. Federal and state funds granted to Wisconsin’s Elderly Nutrition Program last year totaled over \$15 million. State tax revenues accounted for over 40 % of these funds. In addition to the federal and state grants, local program budgets may be supplemented with other sources including voluntary participant donations (up to 33% of local program funds), and/or local county funding.

Program Impact

The Senior Dining Program provides nutritious meals to seniors throughout Wisconsin to support the nutritional health and independent living of participants in areas of significant need. The program also provides important opportunities for socialization for seniors at-risk of isolation. Through the provision of other services, such as nutrition screening, education and counseling services, the Senior Dining Program provides important resources for Wisconsin’s seniors.

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Positive Developments & Trends

A major trend is in the area of health promotion and chronic disease prevention. The federal government has recently offered several grant opportunities for states to apply for funds to implement evidence-based disease prevention programs throughout the state in addition to the congregate and home-delivered meals that are provided.

Concerns, Problems & Negative Trends

- There is a need for better access to transportation services so participants can attend the congregate meal sites.
- Increased funds are needed to help support the nutrition programs in the state. As more people age there will continue to be increased demand for services but there will not be sufficient funding to provide the services needed.
- Since funding levels have remained static there may become a need to establish waiting lists.
- Programs have experienced a dramatic shift in the demand for meal services since the inception of the program. Twenty years ago 80% of the meals were served to groups of elderly at senior centers and other congregate meal sites. Today, only 50% of meals are served in a congregate setting.
- The demand for home delivered meals to homebound seniors has greatly increased. Many factors contribute to the greater need for home-delivered meals, including an increase in the number of community-dwelling elderly, increased longevity, and shorter hospital stays.

Senior Dining Programs would be more effective if...

- Federal contributions are too low and do not adequately cover the cost of meal preparation.
- More eligible seniors could access available services provided through the program.
- Many programs need additional volunteers to prepare and deliver meals on wheels to homebound seniors.
- Some communities do not offer congregate meal sites or home-delivered meals placing seniors in those communities at risk of poor health and social isolation.