

LAURA TREJO
GENERAL MANAGER

CITY OF LOS ANGELES

CALIFORNIA



ERIC GARCETTI
MAYOR

DEPARTMENT OF AGING
AN AREA AGENCY ON AGING
221 N. FIGUEROA ST., STE. 500
LOS ANGELES, CA 90012
(213) 482-7252

Council File:
Council Districts: Citywide
Contact Persons and Ext:
Laura Trejo: 202-5645
James Don: 202-5612

September 1, 2020

Honorable Eric Garcetti, Mayor
City of Los Angeles
200 North Spring Street
Room 303, City Hall
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Los Angeles City Council
c/o City Clerk Office
200 North Spring Street
Room 395, City Hall
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Attention: Heleen Ramirez, Legislative Coordinator

AD HOC COVID-19 RECOVERY AND NEIGHBORHOOD INVESTMENT COMMITTEE TRANSMITTAL – SENIOR MEALS PROGRAMS RESPONSE TO PANDEMIC

As instructed by the City Council in CF No. 20-0862, the Los Angeles Department of Aging (LADOA) is submitting the attached report on its senior nutrition programs response to the pandemic and recommendations for any adjustments and funding necessary to implement them in light of the ongoing need to continue providing seniors with a source of food.

Sincerely,

LAURA TREJO, MPA, MSG
General Manager

LT:JD:Transmittal Senior Meals CF no20-0862.docx

Attachment

cc: City Administrative Officer
Chief Legislative Analyst

City of Los Angeles Department of Aging
Senior Emergency Meals

Background

The Los Angeles Department of Aging's Senior Congregate and Home Delivered Nutrition programs are the cornerstone of the social services provided to support the independence and dignity of the City's older adults. The success of these programs is reflected in the unmatched community impact support that characterize our food programs. Senior nutrition programs serve those most in need, underserved minority groups, those who are among the oldest, are living in poverty, and at high nutritional risk.

Results from prior needs assessments we have performed show that older adults served by the City of Los Angeles are in significantly worse shape than their peers nationally in economic and food insecurity as described below.

- Seniors don't always have enough money from food assistance to buy the food they need.
- Seniors have to choose between buying food or buying medication during the past month.
- Seniors have to choose between buying food or paying their rent or bills compared to peers.
- For 1+ days during the past month, seniors had to skip meals because they had no food and no money from food assistance to buy food.

On June 22, 2015, the Los Angeles City Council on Aging provided policymakers serving the Los Angeles Region their first policy briefing on senior hunger, how it translates into food insecurity and how insufficient access to nutritious food resulted in an annual cost of \$130.5 billion in medical costs.

Most recent reports indicate that as many as 1 in 5 older adults in California experience food insecurity. According to a 2017 report by Guidi and Guerra, "The City of Los Angeles is home to the largest estimated population of food insecure seniors in the country" with as many as 100,000 seniors experiencing food insecurity.

COVID-19 Pandemic

During the COVID-19 pandemic, requests for senior nutrition services increased dramatically. The nature of the event brought to the forefront and exacerbated the level of food insecurity in our City.

As a result of the *Safer at Home* order, Congregate and Home Delivered meals Senior Nutrition programs all transitioned to home delivery. Meals service was extended from 5 meals a week per client, to 14 meals per week given the limitations imposed on seniors to access food resources.

City of Los Angeles Department of Aging
Senior Emergency Meals

In addition, two new programs were created in response to the prolonged pandemic, resulting economic distress and overwhelming demand for meals services, providing 10 meals per week per client.

- The Mayor's Emergency Senior Meals program was created in response to the immediate nutritional needs of seniors, many of which are at 200% of the federal poverty line.
- The Great Plates program was created by the State of California and FEMA, where the City partners with restaurants, hotel kitchens, and taxi companies to deliver meals to older adults.

Here is a breakdown of the seniors we are currently serving in the two new programs and the seniors in our current programs that are receiving additional five meals:

Program	Number of Seniors
Emergency Senior Meals Program	5,804
Great Plates Program	10,900
Additional Meals for Seniors in Pre-Existing Programs	5,000
Total	21,704

The City covers the full costs of the Emergency Senior Meals Program as well as the additional meals provided to older adults in our pre-existing programs. The Great Plates Program is a partnership with FEMA, the State, and the City, through which the City covers 6.25% of the costs and the remainder is covered by the state and federal government. The City must front-fund all expenses and will receive a reimbursement at a later date. The Great Plates program is currently set to expire on September 9; however, it is possible that the program may be extended.

Given that the need for meals is significant, if not greater due to the economic impact of the pandemic on seniors and their caregivers, we recommend that the Senior Meals Program continue through December 31. The cost to extend the program serving the 21,704 seniors would be an additional \$40M, assuming the Great Plates program is not extended and the City pays 100% of costs for FEMA-eligible seniors. This \$40 million includes the cost of a meal (on average \$9), the cost of delivery (on average \$10), the number of deliveries per week (2), the number of meals per week (10) and the number of weeks in the program (16 weeks from September 9 onwards).

City of Los Angeles Department of Aging
Senior Emergency Meals

Addressing Senior Hunger

The following are actionable strategies that the City of Los Angeles may use to address senior hunger in our community. The list includes objectives that will enhance outreach coordination; expand nutritious food offerings to older adults; promote collaborations with public, non-profit and private organizations; and engage the community in support of older adults.

Hunger is a complex problem that requires a multi-level approach to make an impact. While this report outlines the needs and opportunities to improve the quality of life of older people who are experiencing hunger, we must acknowledge the paucity of funding available to combat this issue in our community at all levels.

The USDA defines food security as “access by all people at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life.” Food insecurity is divided into *low and very low food security*. For *low food security*, a person reports *reduced quality, variety or desirability in the diet* with little or no reduced food intake. For *very low food security*, a person reports *multiple disrupted eating patterns or reduced food intake*. National experts use these definitions in federal and academic surveys and literature.

National reports indicate that:

- Only 1 out of 10 older adults who are food insecure receive congregate or home delivered meals.
- 60% of older adults in emergency rooms are either malnourished or at risk of malnutrition.
- Using constant dollars, total federal spending for Older Americans Act (OAA) nutrition services was about \$25 per older adult in 1990 compared to about \$12 per older adult in 2013.
- Only about 42% of the expenditure for congregate meals and 30% of the expenditure for home delivered meals comes from the OAA. The rest of the funding is from other public and private sources.
- In 2018, among elders who are most food insecure are those who live below the poverty line (29%), are Black (15%), are Hispanic (14%), live with a disability (14%), are widowed/divorced or unmarried (37%), and are renters (18%).

California

According to the 2015 California Health Interview Survey - the largest state health survey in the United States - between 37-40% of persons 60 years and older reported that they were unable to afford enough food in Los Angeles County.

City of Los Angeles Department of Aging
Senior Emergency Meals

Los Angeles

Results from our 2016 needs assessment show that older adults served by the City of Los Angeles are in significantly worse shape than their peers nationally in economic and food insecurity as described below.

Congregate Meals Program Participants reported:

- **26.13%** indicated that they don't always have enough money from food assistance to buy the food they need compared to 14% peers nationally.
- **17.29%** had to choose between buying food or buying medication during the past month compared to 9% peers nationally.
- **18.23%** had to choose between buying food or paying their rent or bills compared to peers 8% nationally.
- **12.70%** indicated that on 1+ days during the past month they had to skip meals because they had no food and no money from food assistance to buy food compared to peers 5% nationally.

Home Delivered Meal Program Participants reported:

- **32.81%** indicated that they don't always have enough money from food assistance to buy the food they need compared to 29% peers nationally.
- **23.44%** had to choose between buying food or buying medication during the past month compared to peers 18% nationally.
- **26.56%** had to choose between buying food or paying their rent or bills compared to peers 14% nationally.
- **10.94%** indicated that on 1+ days during the past month they had to skip meals because they had no food and no money from food assistance to buy food compared to peers 10% nationally.

STRATEGIES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Establish the End Senior Hunger Task Force To Improve Access For Older Adult To Food Assistance Programs

The root causes of hunger are not amenable to short term interventions or simple solutions, they are complex and will require a sustainable systems approach if we are to make an impact. We are therefore, recommending a standing body to lead our region in the identification of solutions/strategies and providing support and guidance in implementation efforts. Following are areas for immediate action.

- Use data to map the needs of older adults and their demographics (race, ethnicity), income status (individuals living below the poverty level), disability status (frailty) and those older adults with limited proficiency in the English language.

City of Los Angeles Department of Aging
Senior Emergency Meals

- Mapping the Older Adult Population to Enhance Outreach: Used data as a tool to identify and direct outreach efforts/resources to clusters of low income, frail older adults
- Collaborate with the LA County Department of Public Health: Work with the LA County Department of Public Health to identify older adults that are hospitalized or medically treated for malnutrition.
- Mapping food supports for older persons countywide: Inventory available food support programs for older adults.
- Assess all known seniors centers for feasibility of expanding congregate nutrition program: Identify the reasons why not all senior centers have a congregate nutrition program, are they unable or unwilling to host, and/or is it related to funding.
- Expand funding for meals: Explore strategies for expanding available funds for increased support of meals for older adults.

Increase Access to Fresh and Nutritious Food

Create a Farmers' Market Voucher program that can be distributed to the City's older adults to access fresh produce.

- Farmers' Market Vouchers Program: by providing access to fresh and nutritious food to older adults, will also stimulate the economy by providing sales revenue to local farmers. This could be leveraged by working with existing market match programs that offer 1-1 discount coupons to older adults. Market Match provides free coupons to buy fruits and vegetables that make it easier for thousands to eat healthier, in collaboration with area farmers' markets.
- Continue to expand the partnership with the Los Angeles Food Bank: seek ways to collaborate that can help local food banks can be more user friendly to older adults and to connect more directly to senior services providers.
- Expand availability of Food Bank program: Work with local Multipurpose Senior Centers to create or expand exiting food distribution programs.

Outreach and Education regarding available services is often the first and most challenging barrier for Older Adults to receiving the services they need to stay independent.

- Coordination of Outreach Efforts: Use the City's existing social media, public relations and outreach infrastructure to reach nutritionally at-risk older adults and make them aware of the current public and non-profit nutritional programs that are currently available through the City of Los Angeles (LADOA Congregate and Home Delivered Meals); the County of Los Angeles Department of Social Services (CalFresh and SSI); Non-profits (Meals on Wheels), etc.
- Collaborate with the DPSS CalFresh Outreach Team: Meet with the DPSS CalFresh Outreach Team and establish agreements in which the CalFresh team can attend older adult centers (and other venues in LA City that are well-attended by older adults) to educate older adults about CalFresh requirements and enroll eligible older adults into the CalFresh program.

City of Los Angeles Department of Aging
Senior Emergency Meals

- Explore new program models: Identify new service opportunities such as food shopping, shared transportation to grocery stores, use of social media and other technologies to support aging in place, etc.
- Work with Neighborhood Councils(NC) and cities to do targeted outreach: For example, use “next door” web site, NC Purposeful Aging Liaisons, neighbor to neighbor models of outreach.
- Scheduled Events: Provide opportunities events sponsored by LADOA and other City departments (Sanitation Recycling events, DWP Water/Energy Conservation events, LAPD community meetings, etc.) to give older adults (1) information about how to access LADOA services and resources; and (2) if the event is held at or near an older adult center, have a center staff member attend the event to give older adults an opportunity to complete a Client-Intake form for LADOA’s various programs/services.
- Social Isolation and hunger: Explore with the mental health network how Senior Hunger campaigns can collaborate with Social Isolation campaigns to more efficiently address the needs of older adults.

Support A Plan To Engage Private Citizens And Corporation In Support Of “Senior Nutrition” Programs

Many Multipurpose Senior Centers (MPCs) operate food banks from the food donations that they receive from local Grocers and Food Vendors. These donations give local businesses an opportunity to support their community and they are tax deductible since the older adult centers are run by non-profit organizations.

- In Collaboration With MPC Agencies Develop a Centralized Donations Program to Encourage Grocers and Other Food Vendors To Support Older Adult Nutrition: LADOA can survey their MPCs and compile a list of the food donors for each Aging Service Area.

Work With Neighborhood Council To Create Gardens And Edible Landscapes Throughout Los Angeles Neighborhoods

- Gardening Programs: Expand the number of community based gardening programs for older adults. Gardening programs are becoming popular in the LADOA network. They give older adults an opportunity to grow and enjoy fresh food. They also provide opportunities for intergenerational partnerships between older adults and youth. LADOA can survey its network to determine which service providers want, have or are working toward establishing a gardening program.

Engage and Support The Network Of Meals On Wheels Providers In Los Angeles

City of Los Angeles Department of Aging
Senior Emergency Meals

In California, 37% of Senior Nutrition Program funds come from the federal Older Americans' Act. Most funds to support these programs are generated from local fundraising efforts by not-for-profit organizations, chief among them local Meals on Wheels organizations.

- Collaborate With LA County To Bring Together Local Meals On Wheels Providers: Throughout the Los Angeles region independent not-for-profit organizations work to raise funds, provide services, and share data to maximize impact on the increasing number of home bound low income older adults.

Mobilize Los Angeles Residents to Increased Volunteer Efforts to Address Hunger among Older Adults

- Encourage volunteers to support home delivered meals/meals on wheels programs locally. Work with local agencies to develop a shared volunteer recruitment campaign.

Economic Insecurity and Hunger are inexorably connected to older persons becoming homeless.

- Los Angeles City and County's Comprehensive Homeless Strategies: Ensure that LA City and County include food insecurity and hunger as a critical element of a comprehensive strategy to prevent and address the needs of older adults at risk or who are homeless.

Summary

The recommendations described above are consistent with the needs of older adults in our community and can serve as the first steps towards developing sustainable strategies to combat hunger.

Any implementation of these recommendations will require funding and staff resources to ensure their success. LADOA currently lacks funds and staff to implement these recommendations.

Individuals consulted in the preparation of this report

- Wendy J. Caputo, Executive Director, Sunset Hall and Chair of the LA City Council on Aging
- Ida Tallala, member LA City Council on Aging
- Stephany Vendig, member LA City Council on Aging
- Amos Fried, member LA City Council on Aging

City of Los Angeles Department of Aging
Senior Emergency Meals

- Frank Tamborello, Executive Director, Hunger Action LA
- Sheila Moore, MSG, LCSW, Senior Director, Comprehensive Senior Services, Jewish Family Services of Los Angeles
- Chris Baca, Executive Director, Meals on Wheels West
- Beverly Ventriss, President and CEO, Valley Interfaith Council

LA City Department of Aging Staff

- Laura Trejo, General Manager
- Jennifer Ware, Sr. MA, Research and Planning Division
- Jake Wood, Sr. MA, Program Monitoring Division