

Blue Ribbon Committee on Future Challenges and Opportunities in Senior Nutrition



August 2004



Riverside County Advisory Council on Aging
Riverside County Office on Aging

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“Future Challenges and Opportunities in Senior Nutrition”
Issued by the Blue Ribbon Committee Riverside County Office on Aging
and the Riverside County Advisory Council on Aging

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Summary of Highlights of the Report

The Value of the Program

- Good senior nutrition supports good health and prevents costly illness and decline.
- The senior nutrition program's extensive use of volunteers makes it a highly cost-effective service.
- Existing nutrition programs in the County are well-managed and well-coordinated.

The Growing Need

- Public funding for senior nutrition has not kept pace with inflation and significant senior population growth in Riverside County.
- There are thousands of seniors in Riverside County at high nutritional risk due to poverty and advancing age.
- The growing gap between those currently served and those in need is alarming.
- There are currently hundreds of seniors on a waiting list for home-delivered meals, in spite of multiple cost-containment efforts.

The Solution

- Coordination and refinement of government and community nutrition and hunger programs does increase efficiency and continuity, but will not fully close the gap between growing need and limited resources.
- The public must be made more aware of the seriousness of hunger and malnutrition among seniors.
- A county-wide campaign involving key elected and community leaders is required to address senior hunger issues and secure additional resources.

The Riverside County Advisory Council on Aging and the Riverside County Office on Aging convened a special Blue Ribbon Committee on Opportunities and Challenges in Senior Nutrition in September of 2003.

The Charge to the Committee

The Blue Ribbon Committee was charged to define issues, deliberate on opportunities and challenges in senior nutrition in Riverside County, and compile a summary report on findings, conclusions, and recommend future strategies for approval by the Riverside County Advisory Council on Aging and the Riverside County Board of Supervisors.

The Committee Solicited Diverse Input

The Blue Ribbon Committee heard testimony from national, state, and local experts on public policy trends, program characteristics and requirements, increasing and changing market demand, program innovation, and emerging issues and challenges. They also heard from local and national providers on program cost and quality, funds development strategies, waiting lists, and volunteer initiatives and support.

After several months of deliberation on key findings, conclusions and recommendations, the final report was completed and transmitted for approval by the Riverside County Advisory Council on Aging in August of 2004.

The report, when approved by the Riverside County Board of Supervisors, will guide future program direction, and define the broader context and priorities for the upcoming competitive bid process for nutrition services for years 2005-2009.

Blue Ribbon Committee Members

David Bray, Co-Chair, Blue Ribbon Committee

Member, Riverside County Advisory Council on Aging

Michael Carbine, Co-Chair, Blue Ribbon Committee

Member, Riverside County Advisory Council on Aging

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Richard Smith, Executive Director, Partnership to Preserve Independent Living for Seniors and Persons with Disabilities

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Background on the Senior Nutrition Program

Senior Nutrition is a Nationwide Program Funded Annually by Congress

The Older Americans Act defines and regulates the Senior Nutrition Program administered by the Riverside County Office on Aging. The slogan “more than a meal” captures the program intent to provide regular social contact, nutrition screening, nutrition education, and balanced daily nutrition.

The program has two components:

- ◆ **HOME-DELIVERED MEALS:** Home-delivered meals are available to anyone age 60 and over who meets the qualifying criteria based on a home assessment of physical condition, overall need, lack of alternatives for meals, and/or a lack of transportation to get to a congregate site.
- ◆ **CONGREGATE MEALS:** Congregate meals are available to anyone age 60 and over. They are intended to provide good nutrition, nutrition education, and regular opportunities for socialization.

“More than a Meal”

Social Contact
Nutrition Screening
Nutrition Education
Balanced Diet

Senior Nutrition Services are Available County-wide

The senior nutrition program is structured to provide service county-wide. Available funding is allocated across 10 different regions (known as TAGS or Target Area Groupings) based on current census data and the state formula that takes into account poverty, minority and rural status. Funds are awarded to contract agencies through a competitive bidding process every four years.

Currently, there are five contract agencies serving the County. The Riverside County Office on Aging manages the program in Blythe, since there is no agency available to contract for service provision in that community. Meals are served Monday through Friday. Frozen meals are available for weekends.

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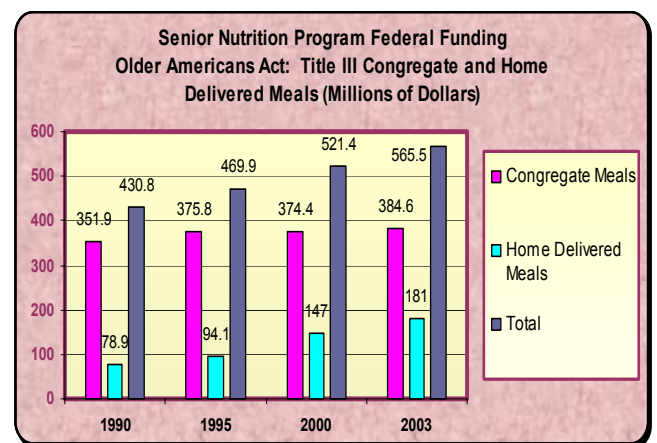
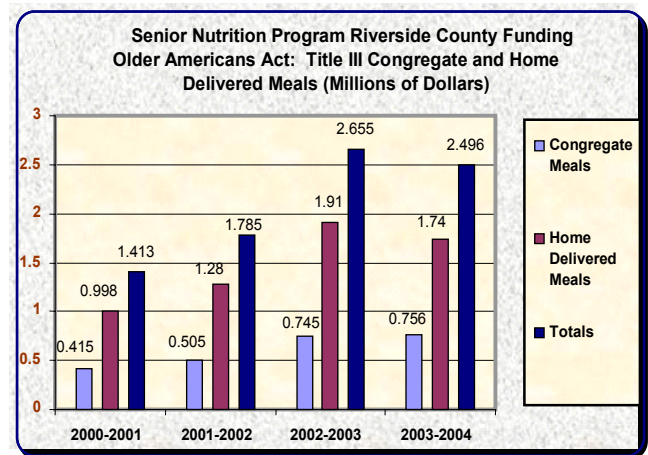


Senior Nutrition Program Funding is Lagging in Comparison to Senior Population Growth and Cost-of-Living

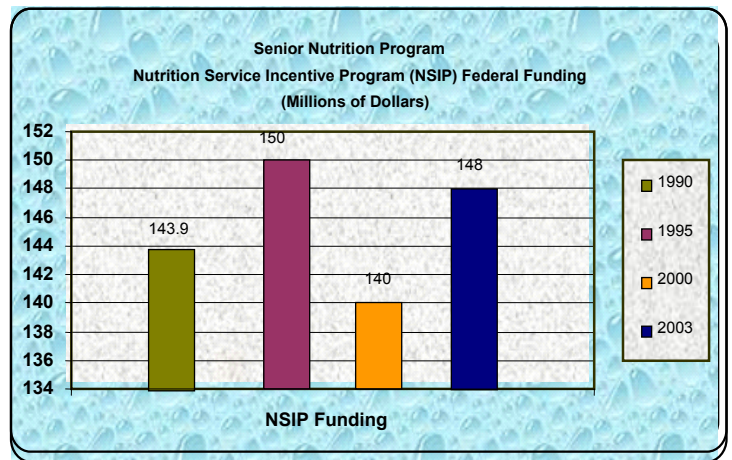
The senior nutrition program is funded from various sources: Congress allocates federal funds under Title III C1 and C2 of the Older Americans Act. There is a 5% required match at the state level and a 10% required match at the local level.

- Additional funding is received annually from the Administration on Aging through the Nutrition Service Incentive Program (NSIP) using a formula that is based on the volume of meals delivered nationally in the previous year.

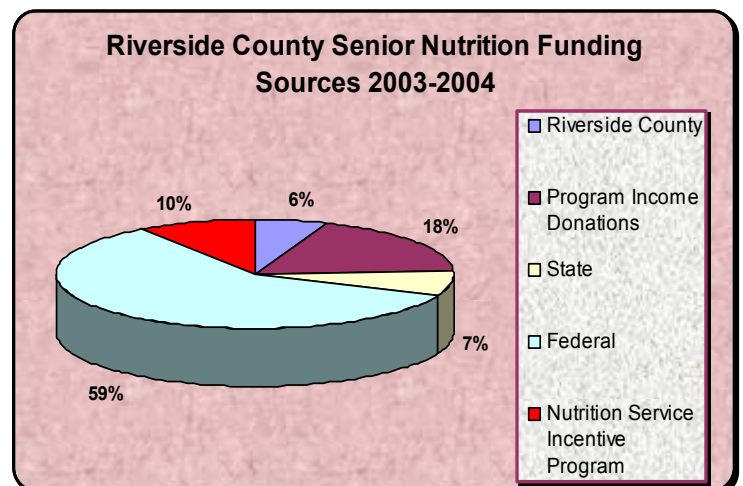
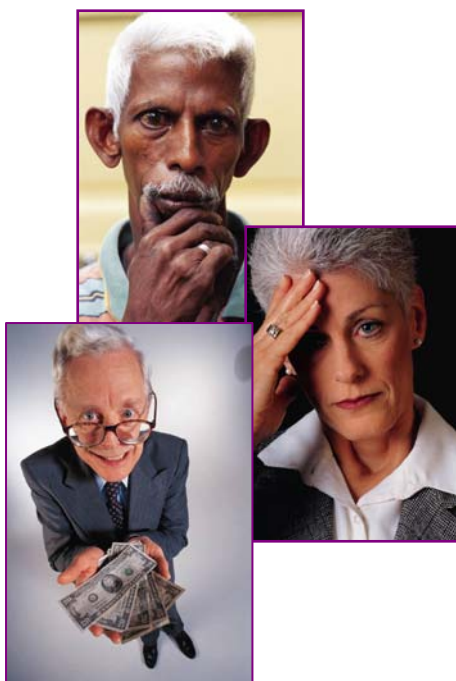
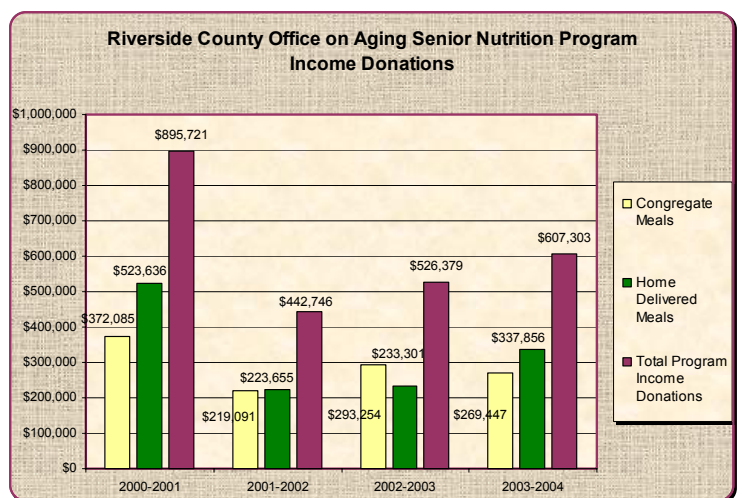
- The California Department of Aging (CDA) may also allocate to Area Agencies on Aging in the State unspent federal and state funds and recovered audit funds as One Time Only (OTO) funds on an annual basis. These OTO funds cannot be used for on-going services, but rather for capital expenditures related to the nutrition program or to address unmet needs through the enhancement of existing services or innovative approaches.



- Voluntary donations made by program recipients are also treated as program income and used to expand the number of meals served. This amount varies significantly based on the financial means of the participants in the program and the overall standard of living in the geographic area being served.



- The overall amount of funding received annually is dependent on the appropriations authorized by Congress. A cost-of-living increase has never been included in the funding. Program appropriations have not increased over the years to keep pace with inflation or with the growing population and increasing need.



Blue Ribbon Committee Presents Major Findings on Senior Nutrition

Overall finding: In Spite of Program Success, Hunger and Malnutrition Among Seniors Continue

Waiting lists are increasing regardless of social and economic status.

Elder hunger and food insecurity is a major national and local issue and waiting lists in senior nutrition programs are increasing nationwide and in Riverside County regardless of social and economic status. Funding has not kept pace with growing needs and demands, and the impact of the aging boomer population has not yet been experienced.

In Riverside County, in spite of multiple strategies to increase efficiencies and target those most in need to maximize available funding, the demand for meals continues to outstrip available funding.

The demand for meals continues to outstrip available funding.

13% of the seniors in Riverside County are at or below poverty level.

Approximately 13% of the seniors in Riverside County are at or below poverty level (an estimated 32,568 persons). The U. S. Department of Health and Human Services 2004 Federal Poverty Guideline for a one-person household is \$9,310 and for a two-person household is \$12,490. With the projected aging population boom, more and more seniors

will require nutrition services to survive and to remain independent at home. There are thousands of others in Riverside County just above the poverty level (13,191 householders age 65 and over according to data from the U.S. Census Bureau). Many of these low-income seniors are also currently forced to sacrifice food in order to pay for housing, insurance, prescription drugs, and other essential items.

There are seniors in Riverside County who are forced to choose between being homeless or being hungry.

Findings Related to Health Status: The Overall Health of Seniors is Greatly Affected by Their Nutrition

1. Some seniors choose poor nutrition and overcompensate in risky ways.

Many seniors are unaware of the impact of poor nutritional habits on their health.

Although food high in nutritional value is available to many seniors, some still prefer the unhealthy fast and/or junk foods. Many are unaware of the potential impact of poor nutrition habits on their health.

Some seniors are using herbs and supplements to compensate for poor nutrition without adequate information about appropriate dosages or possible negative interactions with prescription medications and medical treatments. Medication and alcohol abuse/misuse among seniors is drastically affecting their ability to make healthy lifestyle choices, including good nutrition.

Many seniors are using herbs and supplements to compensate for poor nutrition.

2. Good nutrition supports good health.

Research shows that good nutrition is essential to good health and successful medical treatment and healing. It helps to prevent obesity, diabetes, high blood pressure, memory loss and other high-cost chronic conditions, thereby helping to achieve significant health care cost savings. In addition, good nutrition is a major factor in successful treatment of addictions.



Good nutrition for seniors promotes and supports independent living and can help prevent costly repeat hospitalization and unnecessary institutional placement.

Studies show that 5 of the top 6 chronic health conditions may be prevented, delayed, or managed through improved nutrition*.

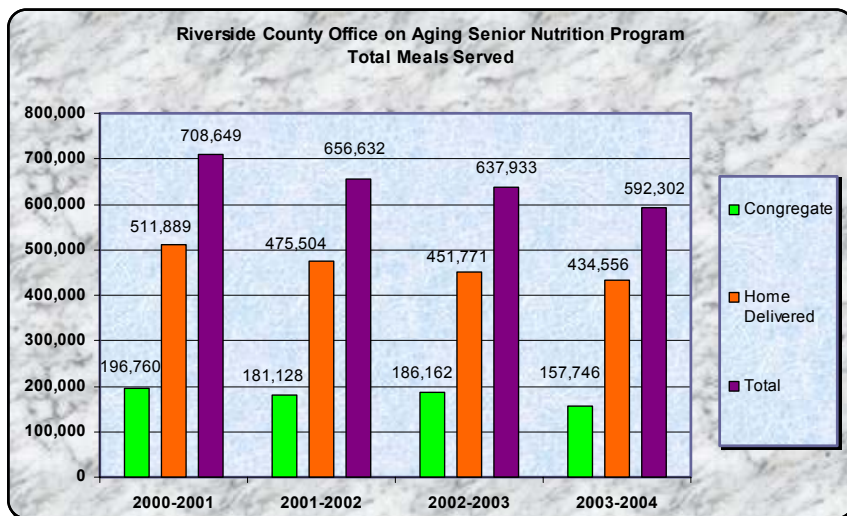
3. Research has also confirmed the following facts:

- ◆ People with diabetes are at higher risk for heart disease, blindness, kidney failure, extremity amputations, and other chronic conditions. Direct and indirect medical expenditures attributable to diabetes in 2002 were estimated at \$132 billion nationally. A recent study on statewide diabetes death rates confirms that Riverside County Assembly Districts 65 and 80 and Senate District 40 have a higher diabetes death rate than the national average*.
- ◆ Based on the Nutrition Screening Initiative (NSI), for every \$1.00 invested in nutrition programs, \$3.25 is saved in health care costs*.
- ◆ Older persons at nutritional risk have 2 to 20 times more complications, hospital stays as much as 100% longer, and costs \$2,000 to \$10,000 higher compared to well-nourished hospital patients*.
- ◆ The cost of a one-year supply of home-delivered meals equals approximately the cost of a one-day stay in a hospital*.
- ◆ The average cost of treating malnourished hospital patients (\$12,683) was four times greater than the average cost of care for well-nourished patients (\$2,968)*.
- ◆ Seniors in poor nutritional status are more likely to need home care or be institutionalized upon hospital discharge, especially when community nutrition services such as meal programs and shopping assistance are not used or available*.
- ◆ Senior meal programs provide 40% to 50% of a senior's daily nutrient intake, making them a key component in their nutritional status*.

*Data provided by the Nutrition Consortium New York, 1997

Findings Related to Need and Demand: Meal Service Volume is Decreasing as Overall Need Increases

1. The number of meals being served has been decreasing because of rising costs and a shift in resources from congregate to home-delivered meals, which are more costly to provide.



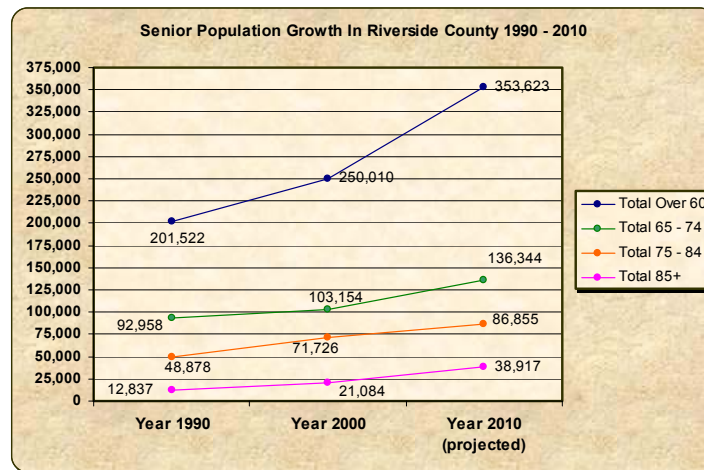
Note: The increase in home-delivered meals in fiscal year 00/01 relates to an increase in funding for the program in that fiscal year. Increasing costs in home delivery led to the subsequent decreases in total meal count.

The declining number of meals being served is not indicative of a decrease in demand. It represents declining volume due to increasing costs and static funding.

2. The population of seniors in Riverside County continues to grow.

The 250,000 individuals aged 60+ in Riverside County represents the fourth largest senior population in the State of California.

Riverside County has experienced a 24% growth in the senior population over the past 10 years, and that growth is projected to continue at a rate of 41% in the next decade. The population over age 85 is the most rapidly growing segment of the population, with a 64% rate of growth in the past decade and an 85% growth rate projected for the coming decade. The 250,000 individuals aged 60+ in Riverside County represent the fourth largest senior population in the State of California.



Riverside County has experienced significant senior population migration from neighboring counties in the last decade. The State “hold harmless policy” prevents Older Americans Act funding shifts consistent with population shifts. This has left seniors in Riverside County with less than their “fair share” of the total federal funds. In fact, Riverside County seniors have one of the lowest per-capita funding ratios of Older Americans Act funds in California.

The State “hold harmless policy” prevents Older Americans Act funding shifts consistent with population shifts.

3. There are thousands of seniors at high nutritional risk due to poverty and advancing age. This number will increase substantially in the next decade.

In Riverside County, approximately 8% of the senior population (19,896 persons) age 85 and over is at higher risk due to increased frailty and need for assistance. The rapid rate of growth of this segment of the population (64% since 1990) partly explains the rapidly increasing demand for home-delivered meals.

The number of seniors currently served annually in Riverside County (estimated to be from 3,000 to 6,000 depending on the frequency and continuity of their participation in the program) represents only a small pocket of the real need.

The number of seniors currently served annually represents only a small pocket of the real need.

Waiting lists in senior nutrition programs have existed for at least 10 years nationally. Riverside County avoided waiting lists until two years ago by implementing a series of effective cost-containment strategies. There are frequently 350-500 pre-screened seniors on the home-delivered meal waiting list in Riverside County. It is not known how many more would be added to this list if the program could reach out to all those seniors at risk and in need.

4. The demand for home-delivered meals continues to rise.

A majority of seniors prefer to remain in their own homes rather than move to more costly and more restrictive institutions. This increases the demand for home-delivered meals.

Seniors prefer to remain in their own homes. This increases the demand for home-delivered meals.

Findings Related to Nutrition Program Costs: Meal Volume is Decreasing due to Multiple Increasing Costs.

1. The total number of meals being served is decreasing due to several uncontrollable cost factors:

- ◆ The lack of funding to offset the rising cost-of-living.
- ◆ Increases in county indirect costs charged to the program.
- ◆ The cost of expanded reporting requirements.

2. Donations from participants in the program are decreasing.

The volume of donations varies greatly across geographic areas depending on the overall standard of living in the area and the income brackets of those being served. While total contribution levels have increased slightly over the past three years, they continue to be substantially lower than the benchmark set in 2000/2001. Several reasons have contributed to this decline:

- ◆ The increasing age of the participants has meant they have less disposable income available.
- ◆ More successful targeting of populations in the greatest social and economic needs has increased the participation of low-income seniors.
- ◆ Service has increased in rural areas where poverty levels are higher.

3. Program mandates are complex and costly.

Complex state and federal program regulations and increased reporting requirements have required more labor and technology. Fiscal and program training and technical assistance to assure contractor understanding and compliance with changing standards is ongoing and time intensive for both the Riverside County Office on Aging and the providers.

4. Dietary requirements are costly.

The new federal dietary requirements and standards to ensure adequate nutrition will be more expensive to implement in the future. In addition, the dramatic rise in Type II diabetes among seniors has increased costs due to needed specialized diets.

5. Aging Baby Boomers will be very costly.

It is estimated that up to one-third of aging “Baby Boomers” (representing approximately 23 million individuals) have not prepared financially for retirement. The financial stress and increase of nutritional risk of the estimated 393,597 Baby Boomers in Riverside County will stimulate substantial growth in the program in response to need. This growing gap between those able to be served with existing funds and those who are at risk is **alarming**. In the next decade, this gap will increase as the projected 393,597 Baby Boomers in Riverside County begin to age*.

**An estimated one-third of aging “Baby Boomers”
have not prepared financially for retirement.**



* data based on U.S. Census Bureau population Census 2000

Findings Related to Service Delivery: Multiple External Factors Influence the Program and Require Innovative Management and Program Responses.

1. The program depends on volunteer time.



Volunteers are critical in the delivery of both congregate and home-delivered meals, and represent substantial cost savings to the program. In Riverside County, an estimated 20-35% of total program functions are provided by volunteers assisting at congregate sites and in the delivery of meals to the home.

It is becoming more and more difficult to recruit and train volunteers to provide this service because of competing demands for their time from employment, family care giving and other commitments. Volunteer burnout is also becoming a larger issue, causing ongoing retention problems.

2. Home-delivered meal service cannot keep pace with growing demand.

In Riverside County home-delivered meals have increased from 22% of total meals served in 1980 to 78% of total meals served in 2004. To compensate for a growing demand that exceeds funding, participants in the home-delivered program are being screened more thoroughly to ensure eligibility.

This more discreet targeting of those in the greatest and most immediate need means that other seniors in less critical need, who formerly were able to be served, are now being left without a meal.

Where appropriate, seniors are being encouraged to move toward participation in the congregate meal program. However, capacity in that program is limited as well, leaving no assurance there will be a meal to meet their need.

**Even with sound management strategies,
rationing of meals is becoming the norm in
Riverside County.**

3. Transportation to congregate sites remains a concern for many participants.

For those unable to drive, transportation to congregate sites is a barrier to participation in the congregate program in all parts of the County. This is due to distance, limited bus routes, scheduling difficulties, waiting times, and lack of private drivers.



4. The senior population in Riverside County is becoming more diverse.

Changing expectations of the diverse senior population are resulting in a demand for higher program quality and increased choice. This aggravates the ongoing tension between the quantity and the quality of meals to be served, since providing choice and offering higher quality meals increases cost and reduces the overall number of meals that can be served.

**Changing expectations are
resulting in a demand for higher program
quality and increased choice.**

5. Improved coordination increases efficiency and quality, but does not solve the problem.

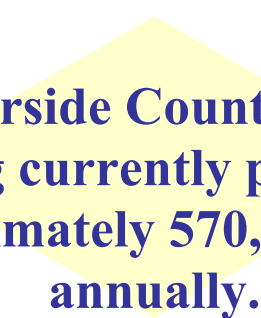
The Older Americans Act Senior Nutrition Program is coordinated with many other programs i.e., food banks, the private Meals on Wheels programs, specialized meal programs (such as, HIV/AIDS patients), programs for the homeless, and local faith-based and social service programs that share the mission to alleviate hunger in the County. This improved coordination has only partially helped meet increasing demand.



**Improved coordination
only partially helps meet demand.**

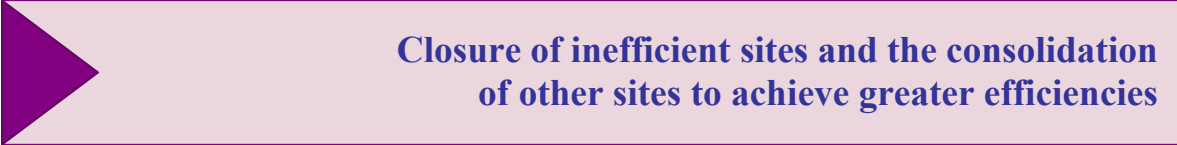
6. The Riverside County Office on Aging nutrition program is cost-effective and is achieving good results with the resources available.

The Riverside County Office on Aging currently provides approximately 570,000 meals annually within resources available. This represents a very good ratio of meal output to funding when compared with similar programs throughout the State.



**The Riverside County Office on
Aging currently provides
approximately 570,000 meals
annually.**


7. Innovative and effective cost-saving strategies implemented to date include:




Closure of inefficient sites and the consolidation of other sites to achieve greater efficiencies



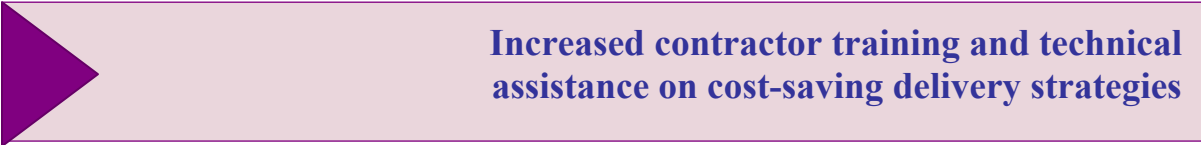
Roll out of county-managed programs to community providers to reduce overhead costs



Introduction of improved food packaging and distribution techniques for greater efficiencies and improved quality



Standardized assessment and reassessment of home-delivered meal customers to verify qualification



Increased contractor training and technical assistance on cost-saving delivery strategies



Application of consistent program standards across providers

CONCLUSIONS

- 1. Growing hunger and nutrition needs among seniors in Riverside County must be addressed.**
- 2. Good nutrition saves money. Meals for one year are equal in cost to one day of hospitalization.**
- 3. Funding for this program has not kept pace with inflation and significant population growth. Funding allocations to Riverside County are not being adjusted to reflect population migration from other areas of the State.**
- 4. All programs addressing hunger among seniors must be coordinated to achieve maximum leverage of available government, foundation, private sector and community funding. Organizations like the Regional Access Project Foundation could be used to help access the funding resources of other foundations.**
- 5. Effective senior nutrition is more than just a meal. It includes comprehensive nutrition screening and counseling, nutrition education, and individualized interventions for high-risk customers.**
- 6. Personal outreach and follow-up are essential to the Senior Nutrition Program and must be provided on a regular basis to assure that there is ongoing social contact and awareness of the participant's well-being and his or her surroundings.**
- 7. The public must be made aware of the seriousness of hunger and malnutrition among seniors.**
- 8. There will continue to be an ongoing struggle between preserving program quality and increasing program quantity as funding remains inadequate and the need continues to increase dramatically.**
- 9. There will continue to be a growing tension between an individual's desire for privacy and the increasing demands for data collection to assure accountability for public funds.**
- 10. Although the Senior Nutrition Program of the Riverside County Office on Aging is well managed, cost-cutting strategies are not sufficient to offset the growing need.**

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. The Riverside County Advisory Council on Aging, in partnership with the Board of Supervisors, the Riverside County Office on Aging, concerned community leaders, and private and public funders should provide leadership for an organized county-wide campaign to address senior hunger issues and secure additional resources. This should be organized as part of the Riverside County Advisory Council on Aging’s initiative to incorporate a foundation.**
- 2. The Riverside County Office on Aging should work with partners and contract agencies to develop new donation strategies that could generate additional resources.**
- 3. The Riverside County Advisory Council on Aging should advise the Board of Supervisors of the amount of public funding support that would be needed to reduce the current waiting list. The Council should also identify the amount of funding needed to supplement One Time Only funds to stabilize the short-term emergency meal program and make it available throughout the year.**
- 4. The Riverside County Office on Aging should provide short-term emergency meals using One Time Only Title IIC nutrition funds within State and Federal regulatory guidelines.**
- 5. The Riverside County Office on Aging, in cooperation with contract providers, should develop incentives and programs to recruit, train, and retain volunteers, and explore the feasibility of implementing an employer “Adopt a Route” program in the County.**
- 6. The Riverside County Office on Aging and the Riverside County Advisory Council on Aging, in partnership with key stakeholders, should develop a campaign to raise public awareness about senior hunger issues. Vendor sponsorships could be solicited to cover educational sessions on senior nutritional needs.**

7. The Riverside County Office on Aging should explore the feasibility of implementing a computer data collection system to track nutrition clients electronically across all contract agencies to achieve greater efficiencies in reporting compliance.

8. The Riverside County Office on Aging should work with transportation entities in the County to explore creative opportunities to transport participating seniors to congregate sites.

9. The Riverside County Office on Aging should conduct an analysis of the pros and cons of expanding the frozen meal option in the nutrition service program, and present the findings to the Riverside County Advisory Council on Aging for its review and recommendation on any future expansion of this option in Riverside County.

10. The Senior Nutrition Program competitive bid process (aka RFP) for the next four-year cycle should require:

- ◆ A plan to ensure nutritional value.**
- ◆ A competitive price.**
- ◆ Effective recruitment and utilization of volunteers.**
- ◆ A plan for compliance with the policy for use of frozen meal alternatives.**
- ◆ Meal service on weekends and holidays.**
- ◆ A commitment to participate in the recommended donation strategy.**
- ◆ A system for measuring and reporting customer satisfaction.**
- ◆ Participation in the proposed educational campaign on senior hunger.**

All other things being equal, preference should be given to applicants who:

- ◆ Use partnerships to leverage additional resources beyond the required match.**
- ◆ Have a track record of successfully targeting diverse populations.**
- ◆ Offer special diets and enhanced nutrition education and provide life enrichment experiences through community partnerships.**



Resource Presenters

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