

DECEMBER 2021

MALNUTRITION CONNECTION

Providing Malnutrition Awareness and Advocacy Information to Share

Nutrition-Related Policy Fundamentals for Supporting Older Adults During a Pandemic



Lessons from COVID-19

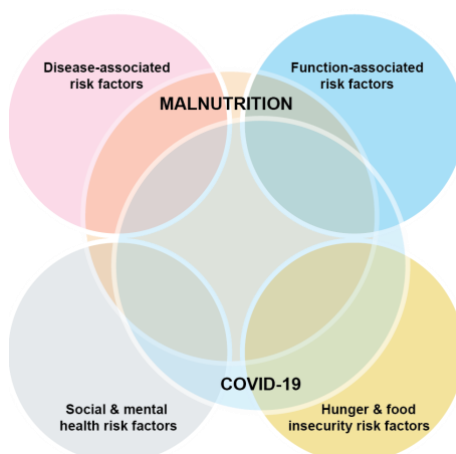
Nutrition is a key factor supporting healthy aging. Yet during the global COVID-19 pandemic, issuances of shelter-in-place orders, closures of senior centers and other congregate dining locations, losses of income, increases in grocery prices, and other changes have left many older adults struggling to maintain good nutrition.

However, there are available solutions to improve the nutrition of millions of older adults challenged to put food on the table. A [newly published article](#) in the *Journal of Elder Policy* – **Nutrition-Related Policy Fundamentals for Supporting Older Adults in the Community during a Pandemic: Lessons from COVID-19** – outlines the problems of older adult malnutrition and food insecurity and the interrelations with COVID-19, summarizes existing federal nutrition programs for older adults and lessons from community-based nutrition programs that refocused some of their services during the COVID-19 pandemic, and explores pre- and post-COVID-19 policy actions and opportunities for improving the nutrition, health, and well-being of community-dwelling older Americans during the current pandemic and beyond.

In summary, the article states, the nutrition-related policies necessary for supporting older adults in the community during a pandemic are the same as those needed to help ensure healthy aging at any point in time, only magnified. Before, during, and after the pandemic, a robust national nutrition policy should include having appropriate systems in place to quickly identify risk for malnutrition and food insecurity and supporting adequate nutrition interventions through fully funding, strengthening, and improving access to food and nutrition programs and community-based meals providers.

These are the fundamentals for safeguarding that no older adult suffers from malnutrition, is left hungry, or is unserved at their time of greatest need.

Overlapping Risk Factors for Malnutrition and COVID-19 in Older Adults¹



¹Whitmire M, Arensberg MB, Ashbrook A, Blancato R. Nutrition-related policy fundamentals for supporting older adults in the community during a pandemic: lessons from COVID-19. *Journal of Elder Policy*. 2021; 1(3):223-260. doi: 10.18278/jep.1.3.9

Key Policy Takeaways for Advocates¹



More funding is needed for community nutrition services to continue to meet the needs of newly-enrolled older adult program participants.



Long-term policy should include an **overall increase in OAA nutrition program appropriations levels** and in boosts to the SNAP maximum and minimum benefits based on an adequate food plan.



States and advocates should build SNAP partnerships with area agencies on aging, AARP chapters, Meals on Wheels programs, and other community organizations.



Passage of legislation to address gaps in older adult nutrition care and food security is also key.



Policy provisions should **allow continued access to telemedicine services** for Medicare beneficiaries, regardless of location, beyond the COVID-19 pandemic.



The **implementation of nutrition-focused quality improvement programs**, particularly those targeting transitions of care, may be beneficial to help malnutrition and food insecurity risk screening become part of routine medical care and care provided during pandemics.