



JUNE 2021

# MALNUTRITION CONNECTION

Providing Malnutrition Awareness and Advocacy Information to Share

## Older Adult Food Insecurity

Food insecurity is a growing problem among older adults, especially those with limited budgets. The pandemic has only exacerbated food insecurity; it has been shown that COVID-19 has increased the risk for older adult malnutrition. According to [Household Pulse Survey](#), some 2 million adults who are 65 or older reported that their household had sometimes or often not had enough food to eat in the last seven days. The pandemic has also shown the significant health equity issues spurred by longstanding discrimination and racism, including higher hunger rates among Black, Latinx, American Indian, Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander older adults.

Two blog posts by Alexandra Ashbrook, director for special projects and initiatives at the Food Research & Action Center (a Defeat Malnutrition Today member) were recently published by the [International Council on Active Aging](#) and the [American Society on Aging](#). The blogs highlight several actionable ways that food insecurity and hunger equity can be addressed:

- 1. Spread the word about the importance of SNAP and other nutrition programs for older adults:** The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) administer a number of federally funded nutrition programs that support the food and nutritional needs of older adults who are low-income. USDA programs include the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), the Commodity Supplemental Food Program and the Child and Adult Care Food Program. HHS programs include the Older Americans Act home-delivered and congregate nutrition programs. Use this Food Research & Action Center (FRAC) older adult nutrition program [fact sheet](#) to spread the word.
- 2. Lift up how older adults all over the country benefit from SNAP:** SNAP is the only nutrition program available to all eligible older adults in every part of the country. Nationally, in [fiscal year 2019](#), SNAP reached on average each month 5.3 million low-income households with individuals ages 60 or older (according to the most recent data available), and this number has grown during COVID-19. In every county of our nation, whether metropolitan, small-town or rural counties, SNAP matters to older adults.
- 3. Connect more older adults to SNAP by sharing information on how SNAP is responding to help older adults during COVID-19:** Even though SNAP helps millions of older adults improve their nutrition, health and well-being, millions more are eligible and not participating. In Fiscal Year 2018, SNAP only reached 48 percent of eligible older adults. Older adults have shared that they do not participate in SNAP in part because of the perception that they will only get the minimum benefit of \$16 per month, or that the application process is too complicated. Now is an opportune time to connect older adults to SNAP, in part because the amount of SNAP benefits a person receives has been increased and the application and re-certification process has been streamlined in response to the COVID-19 hunger crisis. Learn more about [SNAP policy changes](#).

### Seniors Struggling With Food Insecurity may Experience a Number of Challenges:



Food running out



Skipping meals



Choosing between food and medicine



Postponing medical care



Poor health outcomes



Higher health care use and costs

SOURCE: FRAC's Hunger and Health series