

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

September 15, 2017

The Honorable Gene Dodaro
Comptroller General
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G St., NW
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Mr. Dodaro:

According to the Administration for Community Living within the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), almost half of older adults in the United States are malnourished and roughly 30 percent who are admitted to the hospital are malnourished at the time of admission.

To help address these issues, Congress has authorized various programs that provide nutrition assistance to older Americans, overseen primarily by HHS and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). Nutrition programs funded through the Older Americans Act of 1965 provide more than 900,000 meals a day in communities across the country through congregate and home-delivered meal programs, according to HHS's Administration on Aging. Also, USDA's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program provided monthly benefits for food to over 4 million households with low-income elderly individuals in 2015.

Access to nutrition assistance programs is an important first step in addressing the needs of older adults. GAO and others have reported on various aspects of these programs and the Senate Special Committee on Aging held a hearing in July 2017 to explore how proper nutrition can promote healthy aging. However, less is known about the nutritional content of the foods provided under federally-funded programs for older adults, the degree to which these programs are meeting the nutritional needs of older Americans to prevent malnourishment, and the ability of these nutrition assistance programs to meet federal dietary guidelines.

As has been the trend in recent years, research has shown that over the next few decades, older adults will make up an increasing proportion of the country's population. As such, it is of growing importance that Congress has information on the extent to which federally-funded nutrition assistance programs are meeting older adults' needs in order to inform policy decisions about these programs.

We request that GAO examine the ways in which federally-funded nutrition programs meet the needs of older adults. Specifically, we would like GAO to address the following questions:

1. What is known about the caloric and nutrient needs of older adults? What work is being done to update this knowledge, particularly in the area of malnutrition and its relation to health outcomes?


2. To what extent do key federally-funded nutrition programs that serve older adults have requirements related to the caloric and nutrient content of foods provided, as well as oversight to evaluate whether those requirements have been met? To what extent are federal nutrition programs meeting those requirements?
3. What challenges do nutrition program providers face in meeting the nutrition needs of older adults, both now and in the future as the older population grows and becomes more diverse?

Please contact Madeleine Pannell with the staff of the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions at (202) 224-7675 or Samantha Koehler with the staff of the Senate Special Committee on Aging at (202) 224-5364 to arrange a discussion of the specific scope of this work and establish a timeline for completion. Thank you for your consideration and attention to this request.

Sincerely,



Patty Murray
Ranking Member
Senate HELP Committee



Robert P. Casey, Jr.
Ranking Member
Senate Special Committee on Aging