

NEWS RELEASE

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Defeat Malnutrition Today Commends New GAO Report on Federal Nutrition Programs for Older Americans

Washington, DC – The Defeat Malnutrition Today coalition (DMT) praises the release of a [new report](#) by the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) entitled "Nutrition Assistance Programs: Agencies Could Do More to Help Address the Nutritional Needs of Older Adults."

The report, which was requested from the GAO by U.S. Senators Patty Murray and Bob Casey, was released on December 23, 2019. DMT appreciates their leadership in making this request and their commitment to quality nutrition programs serving older adults.

In our request to Sens. Murray and Casey in September 2017, DMT had asked that the GAO look specifically at three questions:

- 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?
- 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 these requirements?
- What challenges do nutrition program providers face in meeting the nutrition needs of older adults, both now and as the population grows more diverse?

DMT is pleased that the report addressed these issues and offered recommendations. The GAO interviewed DMT and some of its member groups such as the National Association of Nutrition and Aging Services Programs (NANASP) in their research.

Among the report's key findings:

- Federal nutrition guidelines do not sufficiently focus on the nutrition needs of all older adults, particularly those with chronic conditions;
- The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) says it will focus on these nutrition needs in the 2025-2030 update of the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, but has not yet documented a plan for doing so;
- Some states are not providing monitoring of menus for congregate and home-delivered programs to ensure that they are nutritionally appropriate;
- The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is not providing oversight to adult day programs providing Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) meals;
- Nutrition program providers report challenges such as meeting demand for nutrition programs, meeting needs for meal accommodations such as medically-tailored meals and cultural dietary

preferences, obtaining transportation for both older adults and home-delivered meals, and finding information on how to alleviate some of these challenges.

GAO provided five specific recommendations, which were generally agreed with by HHS and USDA:

- The ACL Administrator should work with other HHS officials to document plans to focus on nutritional needs of older adults in the 2025-2030 update of the Dietary Guidelines for Americans;
- The ACL Administrator should direct ACL regional offices to ensure states are monitoring the nutrition content of meals provided in the congregate and home-delivered meals programs;
- The USDA's Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) should improve oversight of CACFP meals in adult day settings;
- ACL should centralize a location for information on meeting nutrition needs of older adult participants in congregate and home-delivered meals programs, potentially in one location on the website of the federal National Resource Center on Nutrition and Aging;
- FNS should better disseminate existing information on nutrition needs of older adults to CACFP providers.

DMT looks forward to working with ACL, USDA, and interested committees in Congress to move some of these recommendations forward. They are clearly capable of being implemented without major new expenditures.

The report can be accessed here: <https://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-20-18>

About Defeat Malnutrition Today: The Defeat Malnutrition Today coalition is a diverse alliance of almost 100 national, state, and local stakeholders and organizations dedicated to ending older adult malnutrition. Learn more at www.defeatmalnutrition.today.