Addressing Food Insecurity in Older Adults: Health and Health Care Cost

FOOD INSECURITY REMAINS PERSISTENT
Food insecurity, defined as lack of access to enough affordable, nutritious food for an active healthy life, remains a persistent problem in the U.S. affecting over 10 percent of our population. In 2015:

- 12.7 percent of U.S. households, or 15.8 million households, were food insecure;\(^1\)
- 42.2 million Americans live in households that are food insecure;\(^1\)
- 17 million adults age 50 and older were food insecure in 2014;\(^2\)
- The food insecurity rate for adults over 60 is expected to increase 50% by 2025.\(^3\)

OLDER ADULTS ARE ESPECIALLY VULNERABLE
People who are food insecure are at greater risk of poor health and older adults are especially vulnerable. A 2014, Feeding America and the National Foundation to End Senior Hunger\(^2\) found that food insecure seniors were at an elevated risk for a number of chronic health conditions:

- 60% greater chance of depression
- 53% greater chance of heart attack
- 52% greater chance of asthma
- 40% greater chance of congestive heart failure
- 50% greater chance of diabetes
- 14% greater chance of high blood pressure

Older adults are also at increased risk of mental health problems. The cycle of food insecurity and poor health threatens the quality of life for many older adults.

FOOD INSECURITY IS EXPENSIVE
In 2015, U.S. health care expenditures reached $3.2 trillion, increasing 5.8% in one year.\(^4\) Food insecurity puts upward pressure on these costs. A Bread for the World Hunger Report estimates the health care cost of food insecurity in the US in 2014 was about $160 billion.\(^5\) When applying U.S. food insecurity rates and health care costs to estimates from a Canadian study\(^6\), the U.S. health care costs of food insecurity were about $78 billion in 2015. This means food insecurity costs our health care system about $250 - $500 per person extra each year.

Use the Food Insecurity Cost Calculator to estimate costs in your state.

POLICY OPPORTUNITIES TO ASSIST FOOD INSECURE OLDER ADULTS

- Reauthorize the USDA Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program and other nutrition programs in the 2017 Farm Bill with no benefit reductions. Assure that special eligibility requirements pertaining to older adults stay intact.
- Increase funding for the Older Americans Act Nutrition Programs (OAANP). In 2009, only 3% of seniors 65 and older were able to participate in the OAANP home delivered meals program. A 1% increase in this number could save Medicaid programs $109 million.
- Expand Medicaid in all 50 states to cover low-income older adults.
- Support CMS payment reform for innovative strategies to address food insecurity in patients with chronic health conditions.
Tackling Hunger conducts cutting edge, actionable research and develops new tools to help health systems address food insecurity with the intention of driving innovation at the federal, state, community, and institutional levels. The project is supported by the AARP Foundation and ProMedica through the CDC Foundation, and is being undertaken by the Public Health Institute in collaboration with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Learn more at [www.phihungernet.org](http://www.phihungernet.org).

1 Coleman-Jensen A, Rabbitt MP, Gregory CA, Singh A.
2 Strickhouser S, Wright JD, Donley AM. Food Insecurity Among Older Adults 2015 Update. Report submitted to AARP Foundation.