

SENIOR HUNGER ACTION TEAM COMPREHENSIVE REPORT



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Senior hunger is a growing problem in Dallas. There are programs available to help seniors that are not being fully utilized. The Senior Hunger Action Team will work to ensure that seniors receive all the SNAP benefits for which they are eligible. The team will also look to increase participation in senior meals programs.



Photo by Top Chef Meals



Photo by Michael S. Gordon / The Republican

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Photo: UCLA student serves seniors at Glide Memorial Kitchen & Church in CA. Source: NPR On Point with Tom Ashbrook

Introduction

In this report, the Senior Hunger Action Team of the Dallas Coalition for Hunger Solutions lays out the results of the strategic planning process that we have been following for the past nine months. We hope to impart the insights we have gained on the state of senior hunger in Dallas County, as well as what is currently being done to meet that incredible need. This report will shed light on the goals we have set for the team in the coming year and the strategies we intend to implement in order to reach those goals. Ultimately, we hope to inspire the reader to come away from this report with a new understanding of what it means to be a hungry senior in Dallas and what the community is capable of doing to make Dallas County a better place for low-income seniors to live.

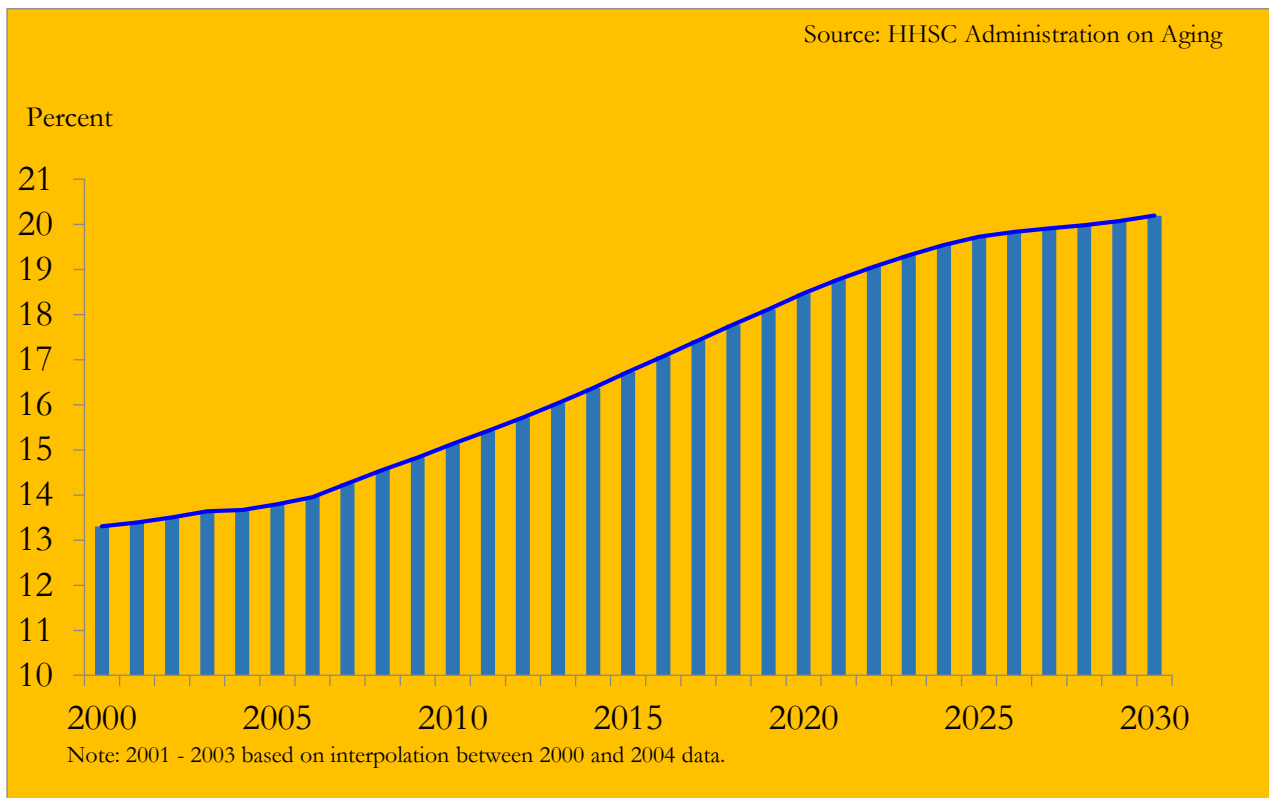
The Senior Hunger Action Team

In 2012, a need was identified in the Dallas nonprofit community. There were many organizations working to fight hunger and help low-income citizens, but those organizations were missing a unifying force. They were missing a place to come together and share their work, collaborate with other organizations and spearhead new initiatives that engaged more members of the community. Through the dedication of community leaders, nonprofits and religious organizations, the Dallas Coalition for Hunger Solutions (DCHS) was born. Chaired by Congresswoman Eddie Bernice Johnson of Texas' 30th District, DCHS is entering its third year of fighting hunger in Dallas County through its five action teams, each focusing on a different aspect of need: Child Hunger, Urban Agriculture, Faith Community Hunger Solutions, Neighborhood Organizing and Senior Hunger.

The Senior Hunger Action Team is chaired by Katie Dickinson, Chief Administrative Officer of The Senior Source, which is a resource center that has been assisting Dallas seniors for over 50 years. The Senior Hunger Action Team was established in May of 2014. Since that time, the Team has been working hard on a strategic planning process to create a set of goals to study senior hunger and to develop implementable strategies for reducing it. Representatives from many organizations brought their expertise to the table. The Team has studied the current landscape of senior hunger in Dallas, identified barriers that currently exist to solving the problem of senior hunger and pinpointed the resources available to overcome those barriers. The team has identified short term goals and strategies to achieve those goals. The purpose of this report is to describe the challenges seniors face accessing food, share the plans of the Senior Hunger Action Team and invite other community members to join us in addressing this critical community need.

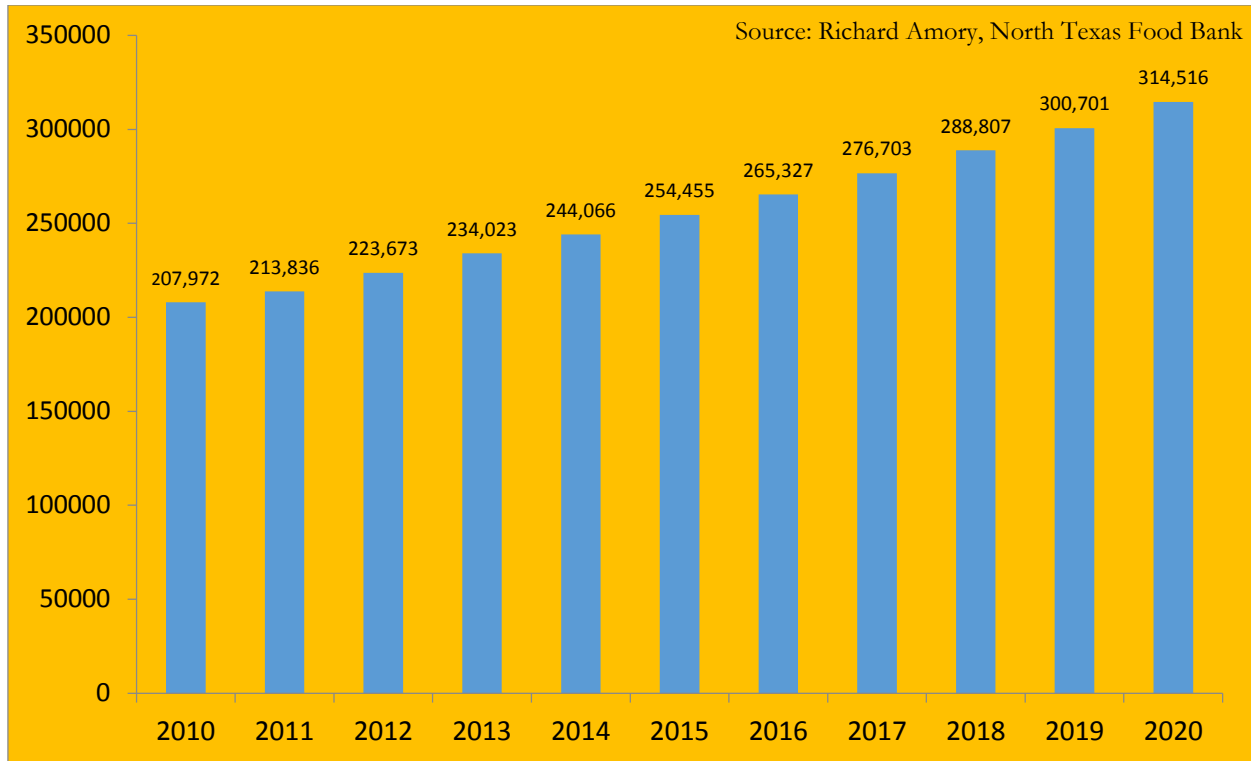
Mapping the Landscape of Senior Hunger

Seniors are a swiftly growing population in the United States, and especially in Texas. Seniors over the age of 60 are estimated to make up over 16% of the population in Texas and in the next fifteen years that number is expected to jump to 20%.



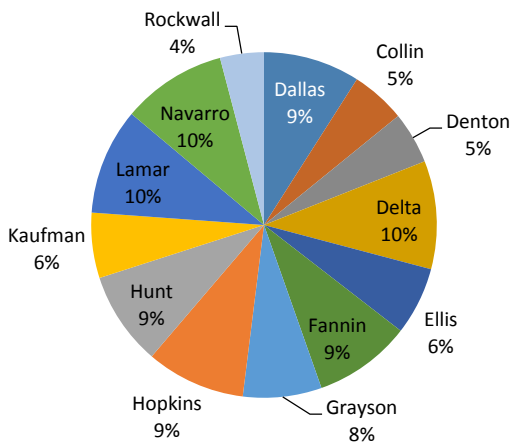
Projected percentage of age 60+ population in Texas

That means that by the year 2030 there will be over 6.5 million people who are older than 60 in Texas alone. In Dallas County, the second most populous county in Texas, the senior population is expected to rise by over 60,000 by the year 2020.

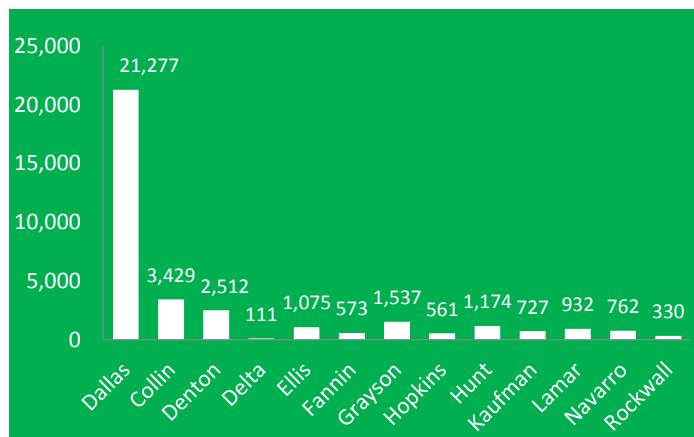


Projected number of age 65+ population in Dallas County

This is hardly surprising given the fact that the baby boomer generation has begun to age into this category, and it would not be cause for concern if not for the fact that currently 9% of seniors in Dallas County live below the poverty line. That means that over 20,000 seniors in Dallas County may not know where their next meal is coming from and have to choose between feeding themselves and paying their bills.



Senior poverty rate in Texas by county



Number of seniors in poverty by county

On top of this, many seniors in Dallas County are homebound, as nearly 25,000 households in Dallas headed by seniors have no access to a vehicle. Transportation is a big factor in senior hunger; if a senior is unable to drive themselves to a grocery store, or if they must take a bus or rely on a

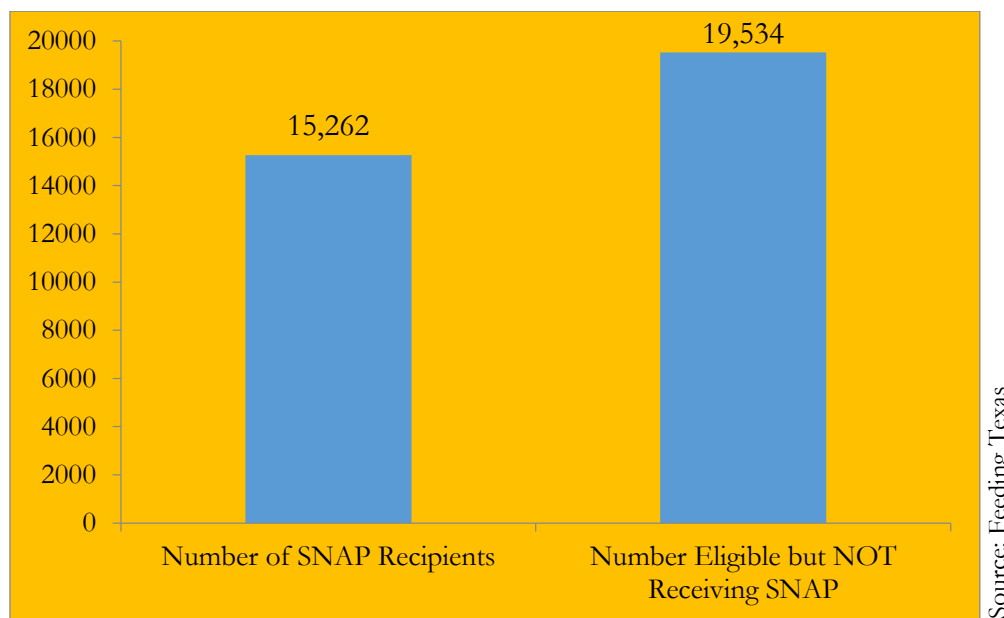
family member for transportation, it is likely to influence how often they make the journey and how well they eat between trips. Fortunately, there are some programs in place to help seniors who are food insecure, including SNAP and senior meals programs.

Seniors & SNAP

What is SNAP?

SNAP, which is an acronym for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program and was formerly called food stamps, is a government funded benefit that allows persons who qualify to receive assistance with purchasing food. Today it comes in the form of a Lone Star card that looks much like a credit card and can be swiped at most grocery stores to purchase food items.

Many seniors are eligible to receive SNAP, meaning that their income is low enough that they qualify for this assistance. Unfortunately, 65% of those eligible nationally are not currently receiving this important benefit. In Dallas County, 57% of eligible seniors are not receiving SNAP. That amounts to over 19,000 seniors in Dallas County who are low-income and need assistance purchasing food, but are not receiving the help they are likely eligible for.



SNAP data for Dallas County seniors, age 65+

There are certain areas of Dallas County where seniors are more likely to be eligible but not receiving benefits. The data available is broken down by zip code, and it is zip code 75216 (between I-45 and I-35, south of Cedar Crest) that has the highest amount of seniors that should be but are not receiving SNAP: 1,841. Other high need zip codes include:

Zip Code	Income Eligible, Not Receiving, Age 65+
75217 (Pleasant Grove)	1,020
75228 (Far East Dallas)	998
75208 (North Oak Cliff – East Side)	855
75211 (North Oak Cliff – West Side)	808

Source: Feeding Texas

Barriers to Seniors Accessing SNAP

There are a myriad of reasons why eligible seniors may not be receiving SNAP. Many seniors simply do not realize that this program exists or that they might be eligible. Often there is a stigma attached to accepting government assistance; people feel that they should be able to get by on their own, even when it is increasingly difficult to do so. Some seniors believe that it would be too difficult to apply or that they would get so little in benefits anyway that they don't believe applying to be worth it.

Other significant barriers include financial issues and eligibility concerns. As a person ages, it can sometimes be more difficult for them to manage their finances and often the bills one is obligated to pay (medical bills, among others) can increase dramatically with age.

Financial and eligibility issues are often intertwined. For example, a widow who had never handled finances before her husband passed away might have a difficult time making ends meet with her suddenly lower income and still may not be eligible for SNAP due to assets she has, such as a car or a small amount of savings.

Current Resources

One of the goals of the Senior Hunger Action Team is to educate seniors about the value of SNAP. Currently, the North Texas Food Bank runs a program called *Growing Benefits: Eat Healthy. Grow Healthy* that is doing its best to increase senior SNAP participation by talking to local seniors about how SNAP and gardening fresh vegetables often can go hand in hand; for example, seniors can use SNAP to buy seeds, or to buy local produce at farmer's markets. While they educate on gardening, they also educate against common SNAP myths.

Did you know?

Seniors can...

- Put medical bills on SNAP applications to increase their benefit amount
- Allow benefits to accrue over time and spend it at their convenience
- Appeal and reapply if they are turned down initially
- Apply in new ways, such as over the phone and online

Organizations like Jewish Family Service and The Senior Source are also working to educate seniors on SNAP in their daily interactions with clients. Both of these organizations are Community Partners, which means that they are certified by the Texas Health and Human Services Commission to provide assistance to people interested in accessing benefits through YourTexasBenefits.com. These two organizations focus primarily on assisting seniors to access benefits; they have tech-savvy individuals on-site who are ready to answer questions and walk seniors through the applications process step by step. There are also many other agencies serving as Community Partners that can provide assistance to seniors in applying for benefits.

The Senior Source and Jewish Family Service also both have money management programs, and The Senior Source has an Elder Financial Safety Center that can help with insurance, financial planning and more.

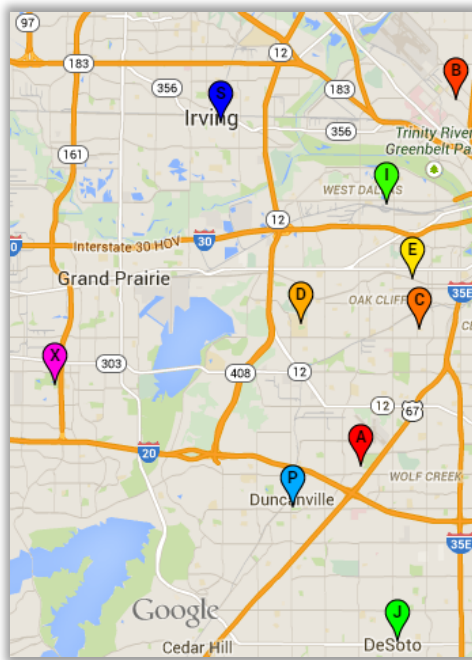
Senior Meals Programs

Congregate and Home Delivered Meals

Besides SNAP, seniors that face food insecurity also have the option of meals programs in Dallas County. This includes home delivered meals and congregate meals, which are free meals served at senior centers and other places where seniors gather. Home delivered meals in Dallas County are primarily provided by the VNA Meals on Wheels program. They serve approximately 4,000 meals per day, and had over 5,000 unduplicated clients over the course of 2013-2014. They serve both seniors and the disabled, but 76% of clients are 60 or over. Jewish Family Service also provides home delivered meals on a smaller scale (they served a total of 14,470 meals in 2014). Metrocrest is another organizations that offers a home-delivered meal service, primarily in the Carrollton-Farmers Branch area.

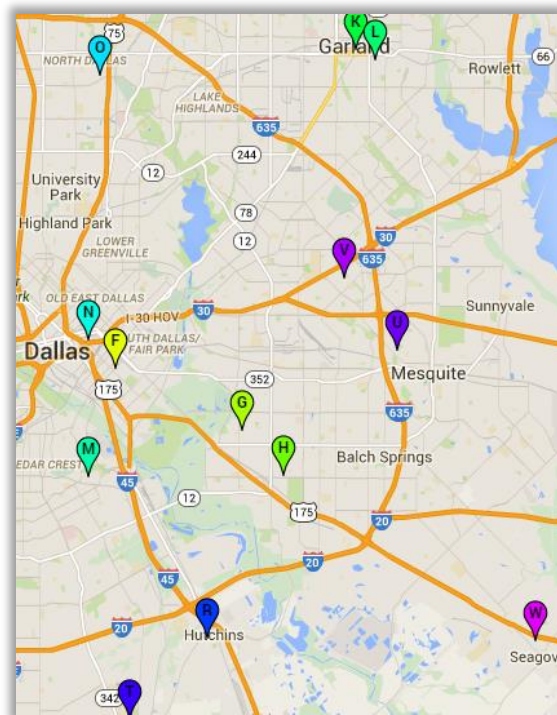
If a senior is not completely homebound, they have the option of going to a congregate meals site. There are a variety of congregate meals sites, some privately funded but many publicly funded through the Dallas Area Agency on Aging, Dallas County and local city governments. To qualify to receive the free meals served at these sites a senior must be over the age of 60. There are 24 congregate meals sites that serve daily in and around Dallas County, both privately and publicly run. The Dallas Area Agency on Aging directly serves 15 of these congregate meals sites across Dallas County, and in 2014 they served an unduplicated number of 2,977 seniors at those 15 sites.

Maps of Congregate Meals Sites in Dallas & Surrounding Areas



- Concord Senior Center
- Deaf Action Center
- Elmwood-King
- Emeritus Center
- Jefferson Senior Center
- M.L.K. Senior Center
- Pleasant Grove Senior Center
- Sunshine Senior Center
- West Dallas/North Dallas
- DeSoto Senior Activity Center
- Garland Senior Activity Center

- Garland Carver Senior Center
- Good Street Senior Center
- Brady Senior Center
- Jewish Community Center
- Duncanville Senior Center
- Elite Senior Center
- Hutchins Senior Center
- Irving Heritage Senior Center
- Lancaster Senior Life Center
- Evans Senior Center
- Goodbar Senior Center
- Seagoville Senior Center
- The Summit



The North Texas Food Bank runs a PAN/Commodity Supplemental Food Program, where boxes of groceries are distributed to seniors once per month at congregate sites. They get their caseload of 8,509 from the Texas Department of Agriculture, and in 2014 they had fully met their caseload.

A Case Study: The Brady Center

Catholic Charities runs The Brady Center, a private nonprofit senior center located in Deep Ellum. The center is funded by Catholic Charities, the Dallas Area Agency on Aging, and private and corporate donations. The center purchases supplies and their chef makes the meals on site. When seniors are done eating, they have the option to stay and take part in activities such as crafting, quilt-making, computer classes and dances. The Brady Center serves between 120 and 130 senior members per day, but they have the capacity to serve 220 and would love to see their numbers grow, as would many congregate meals sites.



Barriers to Accessing Meals Programs

Home Delivered Meals

The two greatest barriers to providing home delivered meals in Dallas County are a lack of funding and a lack of volunteers. The Texas Department of Aging and Disabilities Services wait list for Meals on Wheels of Dallas County is now at roughly 3,800 individuals. But due to lack of government funding, the program is forced to rely on volunteers to meet their needs, which are often hard to come by because Texas has mandated that home delivered meals be delivered between 10:30 AM and 1:30 PM, Monday through Friday. Naturally, this is a difficult window for individuals that work full time jobs. In addition, government funding for home delivered meals has stagnated over the past two years. In 2013, the federal government allotted \$205.5 million to home delivered nutrition. While that jumped to \$216.4 million in 2014, that number has not changed for 2015.

Another program that is working to deliver meals to seniors is the North Texas Food Bank's Nourishing Neighbors program. Twice a month, Nourishing Neighbors volunteers deliver a box of groceries to seniors that may not be able to get out of the house to buy groceries, but are able to cook for themselves. They currently serve 150 seniors every two weeks and are looking to grow.

Congregate Meals

Congregate meals programs often contribute to a sense of community that many seniors may not get anywhere else. Despite the activities that these facilities offer, however, a number of congregate

meals sites in Dallas experience low participation. Just like with the SNAP program, one of the greatest challenges that congregate meals participation faces is lack of awareness. A senior that is mostly homebound is unlikely to learn about a program outside their home, especially if their family or caretaker is not aware of it. Another barrier is that a senior that is unable to drive or one who has no access to a vehicle is far less likely to take advantage of a congregate meal. There are some currently available resources: Dallas County Health and Human Services provides transportation to their meals sites, as do certain private senior centers, such as The Brady Center. Dallas Area Rapid Transit offers a reduced fare for seniors, and curb-to-curb Paratransit Services for people with disabilities. These DART services, however, are not free and seniors often find them to be a difficult added expense.

Another barrier that congregate meals programs face is the very stigma associated with going to a senior center. Many seniors are unwilling to admit that they need help. They do not wish to be perceived as old or incapable of caring for themselves.

Congregate meals sites themselves may face certain challenges. Sites are not always located near where seniors live. A welcoming environment at a site—one that includes games and crafts and other reasons to socialize—can go a long way toward attracting patrons. Sites face the challenge of catering effectively to a wide demographic; seniors can range in age from 60 to 100, a very large gap. Despite the incentives that they offer, many congregate meals sites in Dallas have the capacity for a greater number to participate than currently do. Seniors are simply not aware of the many activities that are offered.

These barriers can be overcome, especially with increased education and awareness.

Goals & Strategies

SNAP

As a short term goal, the Senior Hunger Action Team has decided to identify and focus SNAP outreach efforts on a zip code where the need is especially great. The current goal is to increase senior participation in the SNAP program by 25% in the Ferguson Road Initiative area of Dallas, zip code 75228. Not only does this zip code have a particularly high number of eligible seniors not receiving SNAP, but there are already quite a few existing community groups, congregations, and Community Partners in the area, which will make reaching out to seniors much easier. And by focusing on the 75228 zip code we will be able to model future efforts around the efforts made in this area.

SNAP Goal

To increase senior participation in the SNAP program by 25% in the Ferguson Road Initiative Area of Dallas (Zip Code 75228)

Time Frame: Over the course of one year

Target Age Range: Seniors age 65 and over, and those 50 to 65

Strategies

We will focus primarily on raising awareness. We will develop and distribute literature and informational flyers that describe the value of SNAP, ways to get the most out of using it and the variety of ways that seniors can apply, including by phone and in person at community organizations that serve as HHSC Community Partners. The literature will be distributed at churches and in AARP mailings. We will advertise in publications that circulate in the Ferguson Road Initiative area and utilize connections with neighborhood and homeowners associations to spread the word. We will also be working with the Ferguson Road Church Coalition, and plan to use their large network of churches to reach the seniors that may only leave their homes to go to church. We will recruit volunteers to appear and table at community events, and to provide peer-to-peer SNAP counseling to seniors. We will reach out to apartment managers at properties with large senior populations, as well as to health care providers and caregivers that have regular contact with seniors. We will also organize and host a local senior food access event where we can reach out to the community.

Senior Meals

The Senior Hunger Action Team has decided to prioritize a short term goal of increasing participation in daily congregate meals programs, because there is existing capacity to increase the number of meals served. The current goal is to increase senior participation at congregate meals sites in all of Dallas County by 5% over the course of the next 18 months.

Senior Meals Goal

To increase senior participation at congregate meals sites in all of Dallas County by 5%

Time Frame: Over the course of the next 18 months

Target Age Range: Seniors age 60 and over

Strategies

The strategies we laid out to reach this goal includes an awareness marketing campaign with the intent to let seniors know what activities are available to them at meals sites. Some marketing strategies we will pursue include:

- Radio PSAs
- Signs
- Flyers
- Program calendars
- Newspaper features
- Social Media
- DART advertisements
- Pharmacy bag advertisements
- Utility stuffers
- AARP mailings

The team also hopes to support site managers by creating a survey that will allow us to understand what is and what is not working.

How Can You Get Involved?

There is a lot that we can accomplish in the short term. If we meet our goal of increasing the number of seniors in the 75228 zip code enrolled in SNAP by 25%, we will have helped enroll approximately 170 additional seniors in SNAP over the course of one year. If we meet our goal of increasing senior participation at congregate meals sites by 5%, we will have added approximately 150 seniors to the memberships of local congregate meals sites in the next 18 months. And in the long term we can do even more.

But we can't do it alone. We need the support of our community, your support. The more people involved in this effort, the better. The more people that can talk to their neighbors about SNAP or hand out congregate meals brochures at church, the better. If you would like to get involved in this effort, send an email to Coalition Coordinator Wyonella Henderson-Greene: Wyonella.Henderson-Greene@baylor.edu.

Margaret Mead is famous for the words: "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed people can change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has." That is what we at the Senior Hunger Action Team are striving to do: be thoughtful, be committed and change the landscape of senior hunger in Dallas County. Join us!