



CAFCA
Connecticut Association
for Community Action

Connecticut's Community Action Agencies: Proposal to Study & Invest in Elderly Nutrition

Proposal: With a growing need and rising costs for elderly nutrition services, the Connecticut Association for Community Action (CAFCA) proposes that the State study existing programs, invest additional funds to restore recently-reduced services, and improve the allocation methodology for Meals on Wheels and congregate meals. CAFCA recommends \$750,000 be appropriated from state funds for these purposes.

Executive Summary

Connecticut's Community Action Agency (CAA) Network is the largest statewide safety net service provider, helping almost 200,000 low- and moderate-income Connecticut residents gain access to critical resources such as food, shelter, heating assistance, child care, job training, and other programs. About 23% of CAA customers are over the age of 60.

Five of Connecticut's Community Action Agencies (CAAs) provide either Meals on Wheels or congregate meal services (or both). In 2020, these five Community Action Agencies (CRT, HRA, NOI, TEAM, and TVCCA) helped almost 11,000 older adults statewide with meals.

Both the need for and the operational costs of these programs have been rising over the past several years, and projections are that this trend will continue. Moreover, funding for programs is inconsistent across the state's regions.

The Community Action Agency Network requests that the program structure be reviewed, and that state funds are added to ensure that providers are able to continue to meet the needs of Connecticut's older residents as they "age in place" in their communities.

The Need

The need for Elderly Nutrition programs is increasing, due both to our aging population and to our state's efforts to help people age in place.

Between 2010 and 2040, Connecticut's population of people age 65 and older is projected to grow by 57%, but its population of people age 20 to 64 is projected to grow less than

2%. Overwhelmingly, these growing numbers of older adults want to stay in their communities and have choice, independence and dignity. To make that happen, we need age-diverse communities that support Connecticut residents across the lifespan. Estimates are that, by 2025, older adults will comprise at least 20% of the population of almost every town in CT.

Separately, the operational costs for these programs are rising, due to increased prices for food and gasoline, and to increased labor costs. Grocery costs increased by about 12% in 2022. Minimum wage is up 38.6% in the past 3-1/2 years (from \$10.10 to \$14/hour) and will increase again in June.

Each Area Agency on Aging uses a different methodology for its Meals on Wheels contracts. Some municipalities also contribute to these programs. As a result, some areas of the state appear to be adequately funded for Meals on Wheels, while others have had to reduce the number of meals per customer and have capped enrollment, establishing a wait list.

It is clear that the elderly nutrition program needs review and additional funding to meet today's needs and to be prepared to meet the growing need over the next two decades.

Proposal

Connecticut's program for elderly nutrition has hit a crisis point. Connecticut's Community Action Agency Network proposes that the state research:

- ❧ How much elderly nutrition funding is needed to meet the needs of older adults in Connecticut over the next decade
- ❧ How that funding is and should be allocated, to ensure equity across areas of the state and providers
- ❧ How to plan for future needs.

Meanwhile, the state should appropriate \$750,000 immediately, and annualize this over the next two years, to help providers bring their programs back to two meals/day and remove enrollment caps to serve the need in our communities. Similar requests are being made on the federal level.

Projected Outcomes

The State can expect to achieve the following anticipated outcomes and benefits:

- ❧ Improved food security, health, and wellbeing for some of our most vulnerable residents
- ❧ Improved financial stability for elderly nutrition providers
- ❧ Improved opportunity for individuals to continue to age in place in their communities
- ❧ Reduced incidences of costlier care/premature institutionalization such as hospital stays and/or nursing home placements

Conclusion

For nearly 60 years, Connecticut's Community Action Agencies have been there for people when they need it most and have a demonstrated track record of helping to meet basic needs. As Connecticut looks towards creating a better quality of life for its aging population, the State should review and improve funding for elderly nutrition programs and others that help people remain in their communities throughout their lives.

Background

About Community Action Agencies (CAAs)

Since 1974, the Connecticut Association for Community Action, Inc. (CAFCA) has served as the state association for Connecticut's nine Community Action Agencies (CAAs), the state and federal designated anti-poverty agencies.

For nearly sixty years, CAAs have connected low- and moderate-income people in all 169 cities and towns (and across the country) with resources that stabilize and improve lives and communities. They are well-known and trusted in their communities, providing locally driven programs and services that speak to the needs of those they serve. These services and resources include, but are not limited to, food, shelter, heating assistance, employment and training, asset development, and early childhood care and education. They are independent agencies and also part of state and national networks, partnering with other community-based organizations and government agencies to ensure the most efficient and effective method of service delivery.

About Elderly Nutrition

The Elderly Nutrition Program is a federal and state funded nutrition program that provides meals and other nutrition services to eligible participants, most of whom are aged 60 and older. The Program is authorized under Title III-C of the federal Older Americans Act (OAA). Funding sources may include OAA Title III-C and State of Connecticut.

Meals are provided to eligible participants at congregate meal sites and by home delivery. Each meal meets nutritional requirements and special dietary needs are considered. In addition to providing meals, the Elderly Nutrition Program provides an opportunity for socialization, nutrition education, nutrition counseling and access to social services. Meals on Wheels is cost effective: an older adult can receive an entire year of Meals on Wheels for about the same cost as just one day in a hospital or 10 days in a nursing home. And, research has shown that these essential services not only provide food security, but also contribute to better health, reduce loneliness, and improve overall wellbeing.

In Connecticut, the five Area Agencies on Aging contract out for these services across the state. Five of Connecticut's Community Action Agencies provide either Meals on Wheels home-delivered meals, congregate meals, or both. In 2020, they served approximately 11,000 older adults across our state.

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