Paths to Reducing Food Insecurity among Older Adults

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Defining Food Insecurity

• A household’s food insecurity status is based on responses to 18 questions in the Core Food Security Module (CFSM)
• Examples of questions:
  – “I worried whether our food would run out before we got money to buy more”
  – “Did you or the other adults in your household ever cut the size of your meals or skip meals because there wasn’t enough money for food”
  – “Were you ever hungry but did not eat because you couldn’t afford enough food”
  – “Did a child in the household ever not eat for a full day because you couldn’t afford enough food”
• Categories
  – food insecure if have 3 or more affirmative responses
  – very low food secure (VLFS) if 8 or more affirmative responses (6 or more for households without children)
Figure 1. Trends in Food Insecurity among Senior Americans
Figure 3. Trends in Senior Americans Food Insecurity by Race

A. Food Insecurity

B. VLFS

Note: ‘AAPI NA MR’ denotes Asian American, Pacific Islander, Native American, and people who identify as multi-racial.
Figure 5. Trends in Senior Americans Food Insecurity by Age

A. Food Insecurity

B. Very Low Food Security

60-69 years old 70-79 years old 80+ years old

Year

Percent

Percent


6-12

2-4

0-2

0-0

60-69 years old 70-79 years old 80+ years old
The Extent of Senior Food Insecurity in 2020

By Income

- Below the Poverty Line 26.5%
- Between 100% and 200% of the Poverty Line 15.6
- Above 200% of the Poverty Line 2.9
- Income Not Reported 5.7

By Hispanic Status

- Hispanic 13.2
- Non-Hispanic 6.1

By Marital Status

- Married 4.0
- Widowed 8.5
- Divorced or Separated 12.7
- Never Married 12.8

By Metropolitan Location

- Non-Metro 7.3
- Metro 6.7
### The Extent of Senior Food Insecurity in 2020

#### By Employment Status
- Employed: 4.7%
- Unemployed: 20.1
- Retired: 5.2
- Disabled: 21.6

#### By Grandchild Present
- No Grandchild Present: 6.3
- Grandchildren Present: 17.8

#### By Homeownership Status
- Homeowner: 4.4
- Renter: 18.3

#### By Disability Status
- Without a disability: 5.3
- With a disability: 11.6
Top 10 States for Rates of Food Insecurity among Seniors

- NM 8.4
- TX 9.0
- LA 12.6
- MS 12.2
- AL 9.0
- GA 9.0
- SC 9.3
- KY 10.8
- NY 9.3
- DC, 13.1
Top 10 States for Rates of Very Low Food Security among Seniors
Figure 1. Trends in Food Insecurity among Older Americans
Figure 1. Trends in Food Insecurity among 50 to 59 Year Olds
Figure 5. Trends in Food Insecurity among 50-59 Year Olds by Age
Top 10 States for Rates of Food Insecurity among 50-59 Year Olds

- NM 12.3
- TX 11.8
- OK 14.6
- AR 16.9
- MS 11.8
- AL 14.2
- KY 15.5
- TN 12.5
- NE 14.0
- WV 14.0
Top 10 States for Rates of Very Low Food Security among Seniors

- NM 6.7
- OK 7.2
- NE 5.8
- MO 7.0
- AR 10.2
- MS 5.9
- LA 5.8
- WV 6.7
- NC 6.4
- KY 6.0
Health Consequences

- Lower nutrient intakes for food insecure persons
- Negative health outcomes for seniors
  - 74 percent more likely to be diabetic
  - Over twice as likely to report fair or poor general health
  - 3 times more likely to suffer from depression
  - 20 percent more likely to report at least one ADL limitation
  - 19 percent more likely to have high blood pressure
  - 71 percent more likely to have congestive heart failure
  - 89 percent more likely to report having gum disease
  - 78 percent more likely to have asthma
  - Similar results for 50-59 year olds
SNAP

• In existence for over 50 years
• Available to eligible Americans of all ages
  – largest “near-cash” assistance program
• Central goal is to reduce food insecurity
  – succeeds
• Why does it succeed?
  – reaches those most in need
  – provides a substantial amount of money for food
    • maximum of $459 per month for a family of two
  – entitlement program
  – can be used at virtually all retail food outlets
  – gives dignity and autonomy to recipients
Threats to SNAP

• Deemphasizing food insecurity
  – move to “nutrition security”
    • no measure of this
    • culturally insensitive in approach
    • blames those who are not able to obtain “right foods”

• Restrictions on purchases
  – primarily coming from “nutrition security” advocates
  – will lead to
    • falls in participation in SNAP
    • increases in food insecurity
  – especially a problem for older Americans
Ways to Enhance

• Make into a modified UBI
  – would almost completely eliminate food insecurity
• Other enhancements in near-term
  – Make entering program easier
    • once on SNAP, older Americans tend to stay on program
    • need to consider outreach specific to older Americans
  – Remove asset test (or set much higher)
    • many older Americans are ineligible due to this
    • don’t want to discourage savings
      – especially important for older Americans
  – Higher minimum amounts
    • many older Americans feel that the costs exceed the benefits
  – More frequent adjustments for inflation