

COMMUNITY ELIGIBILITY FOR THE SENIOR NUTRITION PROGRAM

Feeding the Social, Emotional, and Physical Health of Our Most Vulnerable Older Adults

Kelley Dillon, Faith Rasmusen, Lydia Schoof, and Cecily Weber

Photo: storyblocks.com



WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW:

Older adults in Minnesota are at risk of food insecurity. Group and home-delivered meals through the Senior Nutrition Program can help combat this issue and promote the physical, social, and emotional health of older adults. However, not all older adults have free access to this resource. Community eligibility would help reduce food insecurity among older adults in communities with the greatest need in Minnesota.



How does food insecurity affect older adults?

Nationwide, more than 1 in 14 older adults is food insecure.¹ As our population ages, this number is expected to grow. Seniors in MN who suffer from financial stress have many options for obtaining groceries from food support programs such as SNAP (formerly known as Food Stamps), commodity foods, and local food banks. Through the Senior Nutrition Program, they can also get hot, prepared meals at congregate dining sites as well as have meals delivered to their home.² This program is federally funded with support from some state and local programs. Prices for seniors vary from site to site.



What is the Community Eligibility Program?

The Community Eligibility Program (CEP) allows schools in low-income areas to provide free breakfast and lunch to all students.³ This simplifies program administration and removes the need for applications, increasing participation.



Photo: storyblocks.com



How would CEP work with the Senior Nutrition Program?

Applying the CEP model to the Senior Nutrition Program has the potential to support many of Minnesota's seniors statewide. In communities where at least 40% of adults over the age of 60 automatically qualify for free meals, all older adults would be able to come to a congregate site and receive meals for free or have meals delivered to their home. Adults would automatically qualify if they already participate in at least one of the following:

- SNAP
- Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP)
- Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR)
- Medicare

The state of Minnesota would reimburse sites for the costs not covered by other funding. The state would pay a higher amount for individuals who automatically qualify and a lower amount for all other older adults who choose to come and dine. This allows for more funds to go to sites that serve a larger population of seniors living in need.

**MORE
THAN
3 IN 4**



**SENIORS SAY
THEY EAT
HEALTHIER
BECAUSE OF THE
SENIOR NUTRITION
PROGRAM²**

\$ How could Minnesota afford this?

While serving more meals may increase production costs, the CEP can also reduce costs:

- Lessening paperwork reduces administrative expenses
- Purchasing food at a larger scale can reduce the cost per meal

Money saved by these means could go back to support the expenses of the program. The program could also have long-term cost-effectiveness as better nutrition has been shown to drastically reduce health care costs, such as the need for long-term care, hospitalizations, and other conditions covered by Medicare.⁴⁻⁵

✓ Why is this important?

Implementing a CEP with the Senior Nutrition Program would ensure that all older adults have access to the nutrition they need to stay healthy. While some meal sites may serve free meals to older adults living in poverty, this is not standard statewide. A CEP would ensure that those who may have been eligible but were unaware do receive healthy, nutritious food. Minnesota is one of the leading states in fighting food insecurity among older adults, and this program could further its efforts and set a precedent for other states to follow.

Model Program: Semcac Senior Nutrition Services



Semcac Senior Nutrition Services administers 43 congregate dining sites and Meals on Wheels services throughout southeast Minnesota.⁶

In 2019, they served nearly 180,000 nutritious, hot meals at the sites and over 70,000 meals to individual's homes.⁷

Donations are accepted, but no seniors are turned away from meals. This model has improved nutritional, emotional, and social health of participants.

Photo: [storyblocks.com](https://www.storyblocks.com)



Over 50%

of meal-delivery
Senior Nutrition
Program
participants live
alone.²

+ What are other benefits of the program?

- Prevention of adverse health outcomes and diseases that reduce overall healthcare costs via:
 - Nutrition education, health promotion, and disease prevention services at congregate meal sites (such as flu shots and cardiovascular health screenings)
 - Health check-ups and referrals from medical professionals for home-bound seniors receiving meal delivery

“I was invited to come to dinner one day. I was so pleased with my dinner it has been an ongoing thing! I have met so many enjoyable, beautiful people that I now call my friends... and the food is incredible!”

-Recipient of Semcac meals⁶

- Enhanced socialization between older adults and with meal deliverers, playing a vital role in maintaining mental health and well-being. Older adults may otherwise be isolated due to medical conditions, accessibility issues, or living alone.
- Reduced stigma associated with receiving government assistance due to the increase in access and awareness.

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