

Nutrition and Caregiving: A Public Health Issue

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Introduction

Nutrition for caregivers

Malnutrition in older adults

Nutrition education

Resources

Funding

The big “so what”?

How to help

It Starts With the Caregiver!

Proper nutrition starts with the caregiver.

Caregivers must take care of themselves before they can properly take care of others.

Many family caregivers may be overwhelmed and not feel as though they have time to eat a healthy diet.

But, the best way to ensure that caregivers are able to continue to care for their loved one is through remaining energetic and healthy.

This starts with good nutrition.

It Continues With the Older Adult

Good nutrition for care recipients, particularly those who are older adults, is also crucial.

20-50% of all older adults are at risk for malnutrition.

This can lead to more complications, falls, and hospital readmissions.

Well-nourished older adults have better muscle tone, fewer readmissions, and lower hospital costs.

This makes a family caregiver's job easier as well.

MALNUTRITION: AN OLDER-ADULT CRISIS

Just 4 steps can help improve
older-adult malnutrition care

\$51.3 Billion

Estimated annual cost
of disease-associated
malnutrition in older
adults in the US¹



Up to 1 out of
2 older adults
are at risk for
malnutrition^{2,3}



300%

The increase in
healthcare costs
that can be
attributed to poor
nutritional status⁵



20% to 50%
of patients are
malnourished or at
risk for malnutrition
on hospital admission⁴



4 to 6 days
How long malnutrition
increases length
of hospital stays³

Chronic health conditions

lead to increased
malnutrition risk



Malnutrition
leads to more
complications, falls,
and readmissions⁶



Screen
all patients



Assess
nutritional status



Diagnose
malnutrition



Intervene
with appropriate
nutrition

Focusing on malnutrition in healthcare helps:

- ✓ Decrease healthcare costs⁷
- ✓ Improve patient outcomes⁷
- ✓ Reduce readmissions
- ✓ Support healthy aging
- ✓ Improve quality of healthcare

Support policies across the healthcare system that defeat older-adult malnutrition.

Learn more at www.DefeatMalnutrition.Today

References: 1. Snider JT, et al. *JPEN J Parenter Enteral Nutr.* 2014;38(2 suppl):775-855. 2. Kaiser MJ, et al. *J Am Geriatr Soc.* 2010;58(9):1734-1738. 3. Izawa S, et al. *Clin Nutr.* 2006;25(6):962-967.

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Nutrition Education

Nutrition education for caregivers is vital.

Many older adults rely on friends and family for nutrition information.

Also, many caregivers are providing care for older adults with special dietary needs.

It is critical for caregivers to talk to their care recipient's doctors and/or to an RDN about the best dietary plan for the older adult they're caring for.

This is particularly true if that older adult has a chronic condition.

Access to Resources

Access to a strong safety net is vital.

Programs older adults might be eligible for include SNAP, OAA nutrition programs, Commodity Supplemental Food Programs, and more.

But, many older adults who are eligible aren't participating.

3 in 5 seniors eligible for SNAP, for example, aren't participating in the program. This means that 5.2 million seniors are missing out on benefits.

Why?

SNAP has quite a few participation barriers.

But in the case of OAA nutrition programs, it's generally due to lack of funding, creating long waiting lists, for example, or closure of senior centers.

And, the funding issue only looks to get worse.

The initial Trump budget proposal cuts CDBG, CSBG, and cuts HHS by an overall 16%, which is bound to affect OAA funding.

What Would This Mean?

If the budget proposal's \$54 billion in cuts to non-defense programs were distributed equally...

This would mean 13% across the board cuts.

By contrast, the FY 2013 disastrous sequester cuts were 5%.

This would be a disaster for OAA and USDA programs.

It would genuinely mean that people would go hungry and become malnourished.

Tying It All Back...

This is a caregiving issue because a well-nourished older adult is a healthier older adult.

She is an older adult who is less likely to need intensive care in a nursing home, hospital, or around-the-clock at home.

She maintains more independence.

She needs less assistance.

Also...

This is a caregiving issue because many caregivers themselves depend on these programs.

- Caregivers are also aging
- Caregivers may also be struggling financially

In short, these programs can be significant for everyone in the family.

What You Can Do

Contact your members of Congress now—tell them about the importance of nutrition programs.

Call the Capitol switchboard at (202) 224-3121 to be connected.

Or, go to [congress.gov](https://www.congress.gov) to find your members' websites to send emails.

The future of these programs depend on real-world stories, not just Washington advocates.

Conclusions

Nutrition is a public health issue—it is costly and it is significant to both older adults and their caregivers.

The burdens of caregiving may compromise the health and proper nutritional intake of family caregivers.

This puts them at risk of chronic disease and harms their quality of life—which also harms the quality of life of their care recipients.

But, caregivers can make a difference, with their own diets, with their care recipient and in advocating for nutrition programs that keep older adults healthy.