

# Elderly Nutrition Program Fact Sheet

## What is the Elderly Nutrition Program (ENP)?

The ENP, administered by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration on Aging, provides funding for two senior nutrition programs: congregate meals and home-delivered meals. Both of these services are offered to seniors at no cost.

The meals must provide recipients with at least one third of their daily recommended dietary allowances, and are cooked to take into account special senior nutrition considerations (such as low-fat, low-sodium diets). In addition to providing meals, ENP volunteers provide nutrition screening, nutrition education, and meal-planning counseling.

- *Congregate meals*

Congregate meals are meals that are offered to seniors in groups. They are offered at social and community centers such as senior centers, churches, and schools. In addition to providing a hot meal, the congregate sites provide seniors with social interaction and stimulation, and the chance to get involved in the community.

- *Home-delivered meals*

Sometimes called “Meals on Wheels,” home-delivered meals are delivered to homebound seniors who are unable to travel to a congregate meal site. Like the congregate meals, the home-delivered meals provide the recipient with more than just food: volunteers who deliver meals spend time with homebound seniors and provide social interaction that the seniors might not otherwise get. Additionally, during a meal delivery the volunteers are able to monitor the health of the homebound seniors and make sure that they are getting the help they need. At any given time, if a senior is able to attend a congregate meal site, he or she is ineligible for home-delivered meals.

## Who can participate in the ENP?

All seniors 60 years of age and over, regardless of income, are eligible to participate in the ENP and receive free meals either in a congregate meal setting or delivered to their homes (however, because appropriations are limited, seniors are not *entitled* to services and may face waiting lists or no services at all in their community). Some Tribal Organizations set the age eligibility limit lower than 60. Although the programs do not set particular income limits to participate, outreach efforts are focused on low-income seniors and low-income minority seniors in particular.

In addition to seniors aged 60 and over, a few other groups of people are eligible to receive services from the ENP:

- The spouse of a senior, regardless of the spouse's age
- Disabled persons under age 60 who either live in housing facilities where ENP congregate meals are served, or who accompany seniors to meal sites
- ENP volunteers

**How does the ENP work?**

The Older Americans Act (OAA), which authorizes and funds the Administration on Aging and all of its programs, also authorizes and funds the ENP. Title III of the Act provides grants to state and community programs on aging; Title VI provides grants to Native American organizations. These grants are used to fund local congregate and home-delivered meals programs.

Title III supplies grants to 57 State Units on Aging that then disperse those grants to 655 Area Agencies on Aging. These agencies in turn contract out with approximately 4,000 local organizations that provide direct nutrition services. Title VI provides grants to 233 Indian Tribal Organizations to directly fund nutrition projects for native populations.

**How many people participate in the ENP?**

In 1999 (the most recent data available), the ENP provided a total of 247 million meals to 2.6 million seniors under Title III. This included 112.8 million congregate meals to 1.8 million seniors and 134.6 million home-delivered meals to 884,000 homebound seniors. Under Title VI, 1.7 million congregate meals were served to 23,000 seniors, and 1.3 million home-delivered meals were served to 35,707 seniors. In total, the ENP provided about 250.4 million meals to about 2.74 million seniors.

More seniors receive services from the ENP than receive Food Stamps. In 1999, 2.74 million seniors received at least one meal from the ENP, as compared to the 1.699 million seniors who received Food Stamps. However, if all seniors eligible for Food Stamps in 1999 received Food Stamps, that number could be increased to 5.164 million low-income people. A senior can receive both food stamps and ENP benefits.

**How is the ENP funded, and what is its budget?**

Here is a table that shows OAA Title III federal budget levels appropriated for the ENP in FY 2002 and FY 2003:

	FY 2002	FY 2003	+/- Change
Congregate meals	\$390,000,000	\$384,592,000	-\$5,408,000
Home-delivered meals	\$176,500,000	\$180,985,000	\$4,485,000
Total nutrition	\$566,500,000	\$565,577,000	-\$923,000

Additionally, the OAA was recently amended to provide the AoA with \$150,000,000 to buy commodities from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, as supplemental food for the ENP.

Federal funding for Title VI was \$27,675 in FY 2002. Federal funding accounts for less than half of all ENP resources. In 1999 (the most recent data available), only 44 percent of congregate meal funds and 30 percent of home-delivered meal funds were provided through the OAA. Furthermore, these percentages have been decreasing since 1995. The remainder of the funding comes from public state, county, and city sources, private foundations, the United Way, volunteer support, community donations, and contributions from older adults. In 1999, 20 percent of ENP funding came from older adult contributions. The total nutrition funding for the ENP (including OAA funding and non-federal funding) was \$1,055,718,380.

The ENP has, by far, the largest budget of all nutrition programs specifically aimed at seniors. The Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program and the Commodity Supplemental Food Program, for example, both have significantly smaller budgets.

### **How well does the ENP work?**

The last major evaluation of the ENP was conducted in 1996 by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. Here are some results of that evaluation:

- **Satisfaction:**  
ENP participants were generally very satisfied with both the way the food tasted and the variety of the food. For Title III, congregate meal site and home-delivered meal participants reported being "very satisfied" with both the taste and the variety of the food at least 63 percent of the time. Only 5 percent of the participants were "not satisfied" with the food.
- **Nutrition:**  
ENP participants received significantly higher percentages of RDAs than similar nonparticipants. They received more calories, calcium, vitamin B, and zinc. Thus, the ENP improves nutrition.
- **Waiting lists:**  
Mathematica reported that 41 percent of home-delivered meal providers had a waiting list for participants. The mean number of people on these waiting lists was 85. The mean wait time to start getting home-delivered meals (for providers with waiting lists) was 2.6 months. Approximately 9 percent of congregate meal sites had waiting lists.
- **Income:**  
For Title III, 34 percent of congregate meal participants and 48 percent of home-delivered meal recipients had incomes at or below the federal poverty guidelines. For Title VI, 51 percent of congregate meal participants and 57 percent of home-delivered meal recipients had incomes at or below the federal poverty guidelines. Between 80 and 90 percent of all ENP participants had incomes below 200 percent of the federal poverty guidelines.

### **Links and Resources:**

The U.S. Administration on Aging: [www.aoa.gov](http://www.aoa.gov)

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services:  
<http://www.hhs.gov/aging/index.shtml>

Mathematica Policy Research, Inc.: <http://www.mathematica-mpr.com/3rdLevel/nutrifood.htm#Elderly%20Nutrition%20Program>

The U.S. Department of Agriculture Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion:  
<http://www.usda.gov/cnpp/>

Food Research and Action Center (FRAC): [www.frac.org](http://www.frac.org)