



House Aging & Older Adult Services Committee

**Informational Meeting
on
Senior Hunger**

Monday, February 26, 2024

**Testimony By:
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Good Morning. My name is Teresa Osborne. I am the State Advocacy Director for AARP Pennsylvania. Thank you, Chairwoman Kim, Chairman Mentzer, and members of the House Aging and Older Adult Services Committee for holding this informational meeting on Senior Hunger and for inviting AARP Pennsylvania to participate.

AARP is the nation's largest nonprofit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to empowering people 50 years of age and older to choose how they live as they age. With a nationwide presence, AARP strengthens communities and advocates for what matters most to the more than 100 million Americans – including nearly 5 million Pennsylvanians – 50-plus and their families: health security, financial stability, and personal fulfillment.

For AARP, food security is not just about having enough food to eat. It's about having enough good, nutritious food to sustain you and keep you healthy. We believe that access to adequate and nutritious foods is foundational to maintaining health, quality of life, and independence as people age. As such, we feel strongly that no one should have to go hungry.

The [U.S. Department of Agriculture \(USDA\) Current Population Survey](#) defines food insecurity as an economic and social condition of limited access to food that may lead to hunger. Households are deemed “food insecure” if they report three or more conditions that indicate food insecurity, such as not being able to afford balanced meals, cutting back or skipping meals because there was not enough money for food, and worrying whether food would run out before they got money to buy more.

Food insecurity among older adults differs widely by state. The top 10 states with the highest rates of older-adult food insecurity are southern states, while New Hampshire had the lowest prevalence of food insecurity among this age group. According to [America's Health Rankings](#), 10.9% of Pennsylvanians aged 60 and older have faced the thread of hunger in the past twelve months, meaning they had limited or uncertain access to adequate, nutritious food.

Food insecurity can lead to hunger and is associated with poorer health outcomes among older adults. In fact, an [AARP report revealed](#) that adults age 60 and older who are food insecure are more likely to have health conditions such as diabetes, high blood pressure, congestive heart failure, asthma, and depression. Another contributing factor is that older adults are more likely to face life challenges as they age – such as experiencing a medical crisis, job loss, or death of a spouse or other loved one – that may result in financial instability and

make it more difficult to afford food. [For example, newly widowed older adults](#) experience higher poverty rates, greater housing cost burdens, and challenges to getting the help they need.

A [2022 AARP Public Policy Institute report](#) found that food insecurity is most prevalent among older adults who are: younger (i.e., ages 50-59); are Black, Native American, or Hispanic; are lower income; and have lower levels of educational attainment. [Research](#) has also documented that racial and ethnic disparities in access to well-paying jobs, safe neighborhoods, affordable housing, transportation, and community resources – like grocery stores – contribute to disparities in food insecurity. Moreover, with income gaps having long persisted across racial and ethnic groups, it is no surprise that low income is one of the strongest predictors of food insecurity and addressing food insecurity in these communities is very important.

Pennsylvania is a world-leader in agriculture production, yet far too many Pennsylvanians struggle to secure enough to eat. Hunger is not a political issue, but it is a daily reality for many. As a country and a commonwealth, we can do better and make sure that our fellow Pennsylvanians can access adequate and nutritious foods. Developing an understanding of the various nutrition programs and services that are available to older Pennsylvanians is good start.

- SNAP is short for the [Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program](#). SNAP helps eligible individuals and families in Pennsylvania to increase purchasing power at the grocery store, giving them access to more nutritious foods. Benefits are provided monthly through an Electronic Benefit Transfer card, which recipients use to purchase foods at their local grocery stores and farmers markets. These benefits are not cash and can only be used on food purchases. Eligibility for SNAP is based on factors such as household income and available resources.
- Congregate and Home Delivered Meals: Free, nutritious meals are available to individuals who are age 60 or older. Congregate meals are served at [local senior community centers](#) and home delivered meals are delivered through local meal programs, like Meals on Wheels. To access either meal program, contact your [local area agency on aging](#).
- [Senior Food Box Program](#): Administered through the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture, the program provides a monthly box of non-perishable foods to individuals 60 and over whose income is below 130 percent of the U.S. poverty level. Distributed through food banks, the products are provided by the U.S.

Department of Agriculture and includes bottles of juice, cheese, canned fruits and vegetables, cereal, peanut butter, and more.

- [Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program](#): Administered through the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture, the program provides eligible low-income older adults with vouchers that can be exchanged at participating farmers and farmers' markets for qualified foods. An eligible recipient receives four five-dollar SFMNP vouchers to redeem at a qualified farmers' market or roadside stand. There are more than 1,150 SFMNP participating farmers at more than 800 farm stands and 200 farmers' markets across the commonwealth.

Food and nutrition security are complex and require a comprehensive approach that thoughtfully engages a number of sectors beyond traditional nutrition assistance programs. AARP stands ready to work with you to address the pressing food needs of older Pennsylvanians across the commonwealth. Thank you.