BEYOND THE MEAL: NEW FINDINGS ON SOCIALIZATION AND CONGREGATE MEALS

Friday, June 8th 2018
11:00 am – 12:00 pm
Presenters

- Robert Blancato
  Executive Director, NANASP

- Mary Beth Fields
  Area Agency on Aging Director, Lower Savannah Council on Governments, South Carolina

- Meaghan McMahon, MSW
  Director, MBM Consulting, LLC
The Retirement Research Foundation (RRF)

- Mission: To improve the quality of life for our nation’s older adults.
- Headquarters in Chicago, IL
- One of the first private foundations devoted exclusively to aging and retirement
- Thank you to our RRF Senior Program Officer Nancy Zweibel, Ph.D.
2017 Renewal Award from RRF

- **Goal:** To continue to study the value of socialization for older adults who participate in Congregate Nutrition programs under the The Older Americans Act (OAA) and how this contributes to their health and well-being outcomes while potentially saving Medicaid and Medicare funds. The findings will be used to influence future policy decisions on the OAA and possibly other legislation.

- Past research has focused on the meal that is provided as well as nutrition education. *Little evaluation if any has ever been done solely on the benefits of socialization to the health and well being of older adults.*
Three purposes of the nutrition programs of OAA as stipulated in the law are to:

- (1) Reduce hunger and food insecurity,
- (2) Promote socialization of older individuals, and
- (3) Promote the health and well-being outcomes of older individuals by assisting them to access nutrition and other disease prevention and health promotion services to delay the onset of adverse health conditions resulting from poor nutritional health or sedentary behavior

In 2006 the OAA Amendments (P.L. 109-365) added an updated purpose statement for the Nutrition Services Program (OAA Title IIIC) focusing on nutrition and socialization.
2018 OAA Funding Updates

- On March 23, 2018 Congress passed an omnibus appropriations bill to fund the remainder of federal FY 2018
- $59 million additional dollars added for senior nutrition
- $40 million of that funding will be for the congregate meal program and $19 million for home-delivered meals
- *Two senators, whose support for this funding among their peers enabled its expansion, had sent staff on in-person visits to dining sites as part of this RRF grant.*
Socialization in News and Research

- “Gym-Going Seniors Are Benefiting From More Than Exercise” (August 2017, Washington Post)
- “Easing Old People’s Loneliness Can Help Keep Them Remain Healthy” (January 2017, NPR)
- “Loneliness: A Growing Health Threat for Older Adults” (December 2016, Next Avenue)
# Project Timeline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>July, 2017</td>
<td>RRF approves NANASP grant proposal for $20,000 renewal</td>
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<td>August, 2017</td>
<td>Hired PhD professional to statistically analyze Year 1 and 2 data</td>
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<td>Fall 2017</td>
<td>Infographic on Year 1 Survey Results Released</td>
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<td>September 2017 – January 2018</td>
<td>Year 2 Survey Data Collection</td>
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<tr>
<td>February – April 2018</td>
<td>Bob Blancato conducts additional in-person site visits</td>
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<tr>
<td>August 2018</td>
<td>Final Report Due to RRF</td>
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BEYOND THE MEAL
The Value of Socialization in Older Americans Act
Congregate Nutrition Programs

Generous funding from the Retirement Research Foundation

The National Association of Nutrition and Aging Services Programs (NANASP) received a grant in June 2015 for one year of studying the benefits of socialization in OAA funded Congregate Nutrition programs to the health and well-being of older adults.

“I enjoy coming and socializing very much. Makes me feel better.”

9 STATES PARTICIPATED

15 CONGREGATE NUTRITION PROGRAMS PARTICIPATED

1,989 COMPLETED SURVEYS from Congregate Nutrition Program participants were collected

57 COMPLETED SURVEYS from Congregate Nutrition Program providers were collected

“I come for the people as much as the food”

FINDINGS
From the 1,989 surveys analyzed we found the following statistically significant information:

• Those who answered that “socialization is encouraged” at the Congregate site were also four times as likely to say they had a knowledge of good nutrition, had a knowledge of healthy eating habits and had experienced improved physical health since coming to the site.

• Those who answered that they have “more friends now” than before they started at the site were also two times as likely to say that their physical health has improved since starting to visit the site.

SITE VISITS
NANASP Executive Director Bob Blancto also made in-person visits to:

• Aging & In-Home Services of Northeast Indiana
• Meals on Wheels & Senior Outreach Services, California
• Benjamin Rose Institute on Aging and Wood County Committee on Aging, Ohio
• WellMed Medical Management Inc., Texas
• Pahrump Senior Center, Nevada

“If not for the senior center I would be very lonely. It’s a blessing for people like me”

For more information visit www.nanasp.org or contact us at (202) 682-4695 or info@nanasp.org
Mary Beth Fields, Area Agency on Aging
Director
Lower Savannah Council on Governments, Aging, Disability and Transportation Resource Center (Aiken, South Carolina)
Lower Savannah Area Agency on Aging

- 3,945 Square Miles
- 2010 Census Region Population 316,802
- Total Senior 60+ population 68,245
- 6 Counties with large Senior Population Growth
  - Aiken County 44.2%
  - Allendale 11.4%
  - Bamberg 20.6%
  - Barnwell 19.7%
  - Calhoun 28.5%
  - Orangeburg 21.9%
What does Calhoun County look like?

- 2010 Population 15,175
- 2010 Senior Population 3,604 - 28.5% growth
- 2 Municipalities - Cameron and St. Matthews
- Median household income is $42,779
- 1 Senior Center/Group Dining Site
- 27 seniors surveyed
Calhoun County Survey

Age Range

- 85+: 29.63%
- 80-84: 18.52%
- 75-79: 14.81%
- 70-74: 18.52%
- 65-69: 14.81%
- Missing: 3.7%
Calhoun County Survey

Days Per Week

- Twice: 4%
- Three Times: 12%
- Four Times: 48%
- Five Times: 36%
Calhoun County Survey

How long have you been coming?

- 56% < 1 Year
- 18% 1-5 Years
- 15% 5-10 Years
- 11% 10+ Years
Calhoun County Survey

On average, do you enjoy the food?

Yes

No
Calhoun County Survey

Senior Center Participation Levels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Don't Participate</th>
<th>Participate</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Puzzles</td>
<td>44.44</td>
<td>55.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bible Study</td>
<td>33.33</td>
<td>66.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watch TV</td>
<td>48.14</td>
<td>51.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exercise</td>
<td>44.44</td>
<td>55.56</td>
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Calhoun County Survey

Socialization

- Love it 85%
- Like it 15%

[Diagram showing the results of the survey]
What we learned

- Seniors **liked** activities such as bingo, bible study, and exercise.
- They **liked** the food.
- They **loved** the ability to socialize.
- If you wanted to know what was going on in town, you went to the senior center because that is where the town gossip is.
NANASP Revised Survey Tool

- Provider Focused Questions (11 total)

- Participant Focused Questions (11 total)
  - The tool was translated into Spanish
  - A gender and race/ethnicity question was included this time
Participant Survey Questions

- What is your gender?
- What is your relationship status?
- What race/ethnicity best describes you?
- What do you like best about socializing during the congregate meal program?
- How do you arrive at the congregate meal site?
- How frequently do you receive meals at the congregate meal site?
- Since participating in the program, has your knowledge of good nutrition increased?
- Since participating in the program, are you exercising more?
- Has your health improved since you started visiting the congregate meal site?
- Do you have more friends now than before you started visiting the site?
- Do you believe enough time is allowed for socialization?
Survey Participants Year 1

- **WellMed** (Texas – 3 sites total)
- **Area Agency on Aging 3** (Ohio)
- **Wood County Committee on Aging** (Ohio)
- **Missoula Aging Services** (Montana)
- **Litchfield Hills Elderly Nutrition Program** (Connecticut)
- **Senior Services of Snohomish County** (Washington)
- **CAC Office on Aging** (Tennessee)
- **REAL Services, Inc.** (Indiana)
- **Benjamin Rose Institute on Aging** (Ohio)
- **Senior Resources of Guilford** (North Carolina)
- **Meals on Wheels and Senior Outreach Services** (California)
- **Meals on Wheels Fairfield County** (Ohio)
- **AgeOptions** (Illinois)
- **New Opportunities Inc.** (Connecticut)
- **Senior Serv** (California)

**Totals:** 1,989 Completed Participant Surveys and 57 Provider Surveys
Survey Participants Year 2

- **RHSC** (Salisbury, North Carolina)  
  (51 Completed Participant Surveys)

- **Maryland Department on Aging** (Baltimore, Maryland)  
  (532 Completed Participant Surveys)

- **Catholic Charities** (Clyde Park, Illinois)  
  (20 Completed Participant Surveys and 1 Provider Survey)

- **Seniors Assistance Center** (Norridge, Illinois)  
  (20 Completed Participant Surveys and 1 Provider Survey)

- **Catholic Charities** (Arlington Heights, Illinois)  
  (17 Completed Participant Surveys and 1 Provider Survey)

- **Salvation Army** (Blue Island, Illinois)  
  (27 Completed Participant Surveys and 1 Provider Survey)

- **NACOG** (Flagstaff, Arizona)  
  (138 Completed Participant Surveys and 9 Provider Surveys)

- **Wadesboro** (North Carolina)  
  (61 Completed Participant Surveys and 1 Provider Survey)

- **WellMed** (Texas)  
  (201 Completed Participant Surveys and 1 Provider Survey)

- **Northern KY Area Development District** (Florence, Kentucky)  
  (167 Completed Participant Surveys and 9 Provider Surveys)

**Totals:** 1,017 Completed Participant Surveys and 23 Provider Surveys
Survey Participants Year 1 and 2
Year 1 Socialization Data Results

- 2,029 of program participants said socialization at the site is encouraged (88%)
- 1,837 participants said they have more friends now than before visiting site (80%)
- 1,365 participants said their physical health has improved since visiting the site (59%)
- 1,369 participants said they use their car to arrive at the site (59%)
- 1,064 participants said they attend the site almost every day (46%)
- 545 participants said they “Like meeting new friends/talking with different people each day” (24%)
(Year 2) Question 5: How do you arrive at the congregate meal site?

- Car: 57%
- Site Van: 11%
- Share Ride: 6%
- Public Transportation: 6%
- Walk: 6%
- Live on Site: 7%
- Other: 4%
(Year 2) Question 6: How frequently do you receive meals at the congregate meal site?
(Year 2): Question 10: Do you have more friends now than before you started visiting the site?

- Yes: 881
- No: 129
- Other: 21
Statistically Significant Results

**Year 1**

- For those who said that “socialization is encouraged” at the congregate site, they were also 4 times more likely to say they had a knowledge of good nutrition, healthy eating habits and improved physical health since visiting the site.

- For those who said they had more friends now than when they started visiting the site, they were also 2 times more likely to say their physical health improved since starting to visit the site.

**Year 2**

- For those who said they had more friends now than when they started visiting the site, they were also 3.96 times more likely to say they now exercise more.

- For those who said they had more friends now than when they started visiting the site, they were also 5.5 times more likely to say they have improved health.
Survey Participant Comments

Year 1

- “I just enjoy getting out and making new friends”
- “If not for the senior center I would be very lonely. It’s a blessing for people like me”
- “I come for the people as much as the food”
- “It is unbelievable how much we benefit and learn. It is so motivational”
- “I love seeing and participating, singing and listening to music on Thursdays”
- “Wish it was opened Saturday and Sunday”

Year 2

- “I enjoy music, happy faces and education”
- “It helps me mentally”
- “It’s easier for me instead of cooking for myself”
- “To know what’s going on in life”
Provider Survey Results

Year 1

- Range: 8 months to 30+ years in their current position
- Average Participant Age Range: 60 to 96 years old
- Main Issues Participants Face: Transportation, Physical Health & Housing
- 70% said all of the above (including Meal, Nutrition Education, Socialization and Physical Activities/Exercise) as to why participants use the program
- 40% said 5-10 years was the average length of stay for a participant

Year 2

- Range: 6 months to 23 years in current position
- Average Participant Age Range: 60 to 95 years old
- Majority of sites were nonprofit organizations in rural locations
- Majority reported that socialization was “Very Important” at the site
- More than half responded that participants come to program for socialization
- Average length of stay in program was a range between 1 and 15 years
Provider Comments on Socialization

Year 1

- “Very important. It uplifts their spirits, brings laughter, and I think gives them reasons to get up out of bed.”
- “I feel that socialization is just as important as the hot nutritious meal they receive. Without the sites they might go all day without leaving their apartment or seeing anyone.”
- “I think it is extremely important. This is how they keep from feeling isolated.”
- “Socialization is very important in seniors’ lives. Most of them live alone.”

Year 2

- “At this center, socialization is as equally important as receiving a meal.”
- “There is one gentleman who has been coming here for 30 years.”
- ”The center is a gathering place for all seniors to socialize.”
Year 2 Site Activities Reported
In-Person Site Visits Year 1

WellMed Medical Management, Inc. (Texas)

Meals on Wheels and Senior Outreach Services (California)

Benjamin Rose Institute on Aging and Wood County Committee on Aging, Inc. (Ohio)

Aging & In-Home Services of Northeast Indiana

Pahrump Senior Center (Nevada)
In-Person Site Visits Year 2

Executive Director Bob Blancato has conducted the following site visits:

- **Beverly Council on Aging, Massachusetts** (July 2017)
  - Talked to 35 participants, mostly white, majority women and 90% gave socialization as the primary reason for coming to the program

- **Seniors Resources of Guilford County, North Carolina** (September 2017)
  - Talked to 25-30 participants, including two tables with refugees, 90% responded that socialization was their main reason for coming

- **McBride Center, Knoxville, Tennessee** (October 2017)
  - Talked to 20 participants, more than half had been coming for 8+ years

- **Area Agency on Aging (NACOG), Flagstaff, Arizona** (October 2017)

- **Serving Seniors, San Diego California** (December 2017)
  - Town Hall meeting with 100 seniors. Follow up in form of letter to congressional offices
In-Person Site Visits Continued

- **Food Bank WNY, Buffalo New York** (December 2017)
  - 20 participants, more than half had come 10+ years

- **Centralina Area Agency on Aging, Charlotte North Carolina** (January 2018)
  - First visit with a congressional staff member, Josh Ward (Chief Field Representative for Senator Richard Burr, the Subcommittee Chair on the Senate HELP Committee)

- **American Association of Retired Asians, Hanover Park Illinois** (March 2018)

- **Brattleboro Senior Meals, Vermont** (April 2018)
  - Joined by Outreach Representative for Senator Sanders
Questions?
Meaghan McMahon, MSW

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