

ANALYSIS OF SENIOR NUTRITION SYSTEM IN MAT-SU

OCTOBER 2019



REPORT PURPOSE

Determine:

- What programs and funding exist for senior nutrition in Mat-Su,
- How these programs work together, and
- What options exist for service coordination and alignment to enhance access to nutrition for older adults.

PROCESS

Between May and September 2019:

- Conducted key informant interviews.
- Held focus groups.
- Visited senior nutrition locations.
- Identified the senior nutrition landscape.
- Identified demographic trends.
- Researched funding and best practice options.

THE NEED NOW

- It is estimated that 7.7% of all individuals age 60 and older are hungry. This translates to more than 1,260 older adults in Mat-Su who don't have consistent access to enough food for a healthy life.

THE NEED IN THE FUTURE: MAT-SU HAS THE FASTEST GROWING OLDER ADULT POPULATION IN THE STATE.

By 2030:

- More than one in five Mat-Su residents, nearly 27,500 people, will be age 60 and older.
- Residents over the age of 85 years will increase by 188 percent to 1,864.
- The number of Alaska Native People age 60 and older will be 13.4 percent of the population.
- According to the General Accounting Office (GAO), an estimated 7,423 will need home-based care. Many of these residents may need home-delivered meals, some of which may be provided by Medicaid personal care attendants.
- An estimated 988 low-income older adults (below 150% of the poverty level) will need home-delivered or congregate meals, a staggering 69% increase in need.

BARRIERS TO ACCESSING SERVICES

- Lack of transportation,
- Lack of financial resources
- Lack of volunteers, and
- An often fiercely independent older adult population who may not be willing to access services even when they may need them and require special outreach and trust building

FUNDING FOR SENIOR NUTRITION

- **The Nutrition, Transportation and Support Services (NTS) Grant funding for Mat-Su is the lowest per capita funding rate for any region in the state at \$33.33 per person age 60 and older. Changing the rural designation for the borough could increase investment by more than \$100,000. Census participation will also help maximize the state allocation.**
- Additional federal funding may be available for senior nutrition through Title XX of the Social Security Act which is currently focused on children's services in Alaska.
- State funding alone, even with potential increases, is not enough to fully fund senior nutrition services in Mat-Su. An increase in private funding will be essential.
- There is an opportunity for programs to maximize their participation in current senior nutrition programs including the Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program and the Emergency Food and Shelter Program.

OVERALL FINDINGS

- The Mat-Su Borough has the right types of senior nutrition services available to the older adult population.
- There are not enough services to fully cover the need.
- For the most part, senior nutrition services offer good quality food and support.
- Access to services, especially lack of transportation, is one of the biggest hurdles faced by providers in the senior nutrition system.
- Government funding will not be enough to sustain senior nutrition services to meet the current or future need; additional private investment will be a necessity.
- While current senior nutrition providers appear open to collaboration and regional service provision, a process of trust building and determination of shared goals and vision will need to take place.

OPPORTUNITY TO MAKE SYSTEM CHANGES

- Providers are in place to serve the continuum of nutrition services for older adults.
- There is commitment from leadership to want to improve the overall system.
- Leadership transitions provide an opportunity to make changes.
- There is a diversity of strengths among the senior nutrition providers which provides an opportunity for peer learning and best practice sharing.
- There are opportunities to better engage the local community for volunteerism and local fundraising.

SUMMARY

- Mat-Su has senior nutrition providers who can provide services to meet the range of nutrition needs of older adults.
- The current service gap is of manageable size and can be addressed with better coordination and increased private funding.
- With the impending growth of the older adult population, there will need to be better coordination and less competition in the provision of senior nutrition services and the fundraising needed to make that possible.
- Mat-Su has the people and programs in place to make this happen.