



Keeping the Dream Alive: Hunger by the Numbers among Older Americans

Hunger has become a harsh reality for many baby boomers entering retirement over the past few years. In 2012, the most recent year for which data is available, 2.8 million households with seniors experienced food insecurity. That same year 3.9 million adults age 65 and older lived below the poverty line. From 2001 to 2011, the percentage of seniors experiencing hunger increased by an astonishing 88 percent.

It is projected that there will be 79 million more seniors in the United States by 2040. If food insecurity and poverty trends continue, by 2025, the number of food-insecure seniors will increase by 50 percent. Older Americans are less likely to participate in programs like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) or Meals on Wheels because they are either unaware that they are eligible or they associate these programs with certain negative stigmas.

Seniors and SNAP

Across all categories, including older adult age groups, food insecurity increased substantially after 2007 due to the Great Recession.



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Infographic by Doug Puller/Bread for the World

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It is interesting to note, however, that seniors with incomes above the poverty line faced a far more dramatic increase in food insecurity than poor and near poor seniors in that time frame. This is due largely to programs like SNAP that help stave off hunger among vulnerable people.

SNAP is designed to respond during times of economic crisis, so that hunger remains at bay despite increased need. However, negative preconceptions about the program and its beneficiaries, coupled with limited awareness of available resources, result in fewer seniors taking advantage of it than are eligible. But at a time when 30 percent of seniors who have worked their entire lives and contributed greatly to society now have to choose between feeding themselves or purchasing medication, these factors can no longer be an excuse. Food insecurity leads to greater health risks with food insecure seniors 2.33 times more likely to report fair or poor health status.

Grandparents

Grandparents raising their grandchildren are more likely to suffer from food insecurity. Since most grandparents would rather suffer hunger than see their grandchildren with empty plates, it is easy to see how seniors living in a household with grandchildren present were 34.91 percent



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more likely to suffer from food insecurity than those in households with no grandchildren present. Among those in households with no grandchildren present, 14.26 percent were likely to suffer from food insecurity.

How we treat our seniors is a testament to the values we hold dear in our society. If millions of seniors suffer from hunger, what does that say about the American Dream? Programs like SNAP exist to help those who have fallen on harder times. These programs help keep the dream alive while the economy continues to recover.



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