

Executive Summary



Hunger and Nutrition in America: What's at Stake for Children, Families and Older Adults



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Acknowledgements

Generations United gratefully acknowledges the support of the following dedicated individuals and organizations whose work and encouragement made this research and report possible:

The individuals, families, and programs profiled in this publication.

Jaia Peterson Lent and Wendy Heiges who researched and wrote the primary content of the report;

Generations United staff Colleen Appleby-Carroll for editing the document and writing the program profiles; Marsha Adler for interviewing and writing the profile of Olivia and Richard; Sheri Steinig, Anne Wise, Melissa Ness, Donna Butts, Eric Masten and Erica Jorde for their research, thoughtful input and feedback;

Generations United Board Members James Taylor (Sodexo Inc.) and Walter Jones (Verizon Wireless), Robert Egger (DC Central Kitchen and L.A. Kitchen), Lisa Peters-Beumer (Easter Seals), Sophie Milam and Elaine Waxman (Feeding America), Melissa Roy (Share Our Strength), Craig Gunderson (University of Illinois) and Jim Weill (Food Research Action Center) for their guidance, review and input;

Members of Generations United's Public Policy and Program Committees for their review and input into recommendations; and

Julie Tucker, DoubleDog Design Studio, for design of the poll data infographics. www.doubledogdesignstudio.com.

Finally we extend our gratitude to Atlantic Philanthropies, AARP, and Generations United members and friends whose support made this report possible.

Design and Layout: Marcia DeLong, DeLong Lithographics.

Cover photos: Denzel Mitchell, Juliana B., Debra Burris, Robert Targett

Disclaimers

This research and report were funded in part by The Atlantic Philanthropies and AARP. We thank them for their support but acknowledge that the ideas, findings and conclusions presented in this report are those of the authors alone and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the foundation or the individual reviewers.

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About Generations United

Generations United is the only national membership organization focused solely on improving the lives of children, youth, and older people through intergenerational strategies, programs, and public policies. Since 1986, Generations United has served as a resource for educating policymakers and the public about the economic, social, and personal imperatives of intergenerational cooperation. Generations United acts as a catalyst for stimulating collaboration between aging, children, and youth organizations, providing a forum to explore areas of common ground while celebrating the richness of each generation.

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Survey Methodology

Harris Interactive® fielded the study on behalf of Generations United from September 24-26, 2012 via its Harris Poll QuickQuerySM online omnibus service, interviewing a nationwide sample of 2,397 U.S. residents age 18 years or older; 303 respondents from this survey sought or received food assistance in the past 12 months. Figures for age, sex, race/ethnicity, education, region, household income, and age of children in the household were weighted where necessary to bring them into line with their actual proportions in the population. Propensity score weighting was also used to adjust for respondents' propensity to be online.

Respondents for this survey were selected from among those who have agreed to participate in Harris Interactive surveys. The data have been weighted to reflect the composition of the U.S. general population. Because the sample is based on those who agreed to be invited to participate in the Harris Interactive online research panel, no estimates of theoretical sampling error can be calculated.

All sample surveys and polls, whether or not they use probability sampling, are subject to multiple sources of error which are most often not possible to quantify or estimate, including sampling error, coverage error, error associated with non-response, error associated with question wording and response options, and post-survey weighting and adjustments. Therefore, Harris Interactive avoids the words "margin of error" as they are misleading. All that can be calculated are different possible sampling errors with different probabilities for pure, unweighted, random samples with 100 percent response rates. These are only theoretical because no published polls come close to this ideal.

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Executive Summary



Photo by Denzel Mitchell

The needs of our bookend generations are acute. Nearly a fifth of our country's children (almost 16.7 million) live in households where they lack consistent access to enough nutritious food for a healthy life.¹ About 4.5 million (one in 12) adults age 60 and older are now at risk of hunger or food insecure. Using an expanded measure, nearly 8.3 million (one in seven) older adults are, at times, anxious about whether they will have enough to eat.² These disturbing trends cannot be ignored in today's America.

Adequate nutrition helps children and youth concentrate in class, improves their memory and overall behavior, and leads to better health and fewer visits to the doctor. For older adults, access to good nutrition also improves memory, helps maintain healthy physical activity, and reduces the number of trips to the doctor. The benefits of good nutrition are clear. How can we ensure the most vulnerable among us are well nourished?

In thousands of communities, houses of worship, food pantries, soup kitchens and emergency shelters play key roles in providing food assistance to needy children, youth, older adults and families. They bring people of all ages together to help their neighbors during times of hardship and alleviate a painful source of anxiety: where the next meal is coming from. And, of course, a function of the federal government is to address hunger.

Unfortunately, the U.S. economy is in dire financial straits. The prospects of revenue increases and budget cuts threaten the economic stability of nutrition assistance programs and other critical social services. While Americans hope for serious and thoughtful nonpartisan deliberations on how to solve our fiscal problems, many of us fear the economy will not improve any time soon. Meanwhile, millions of vulnerable people depend on strong federal nutrition programs to put food on the table and help make ends meet.

To find out how Americans think we are doing to meet the nutritional needs of our younger and older family members, Generations United commissioned a nationwide survey conducted by Harris Interactive from September 24 to 26, 2012.

When asked about experience with the lack of food in the previous last 12 months:

- 33% of respondents had experience with or concern about the lack of food among their family members, friends or neighbors. Respondents ages 18 to 34 were most likely affected. Half of those respondents reported having had such a concern or experience.
- 10% of respondents went without a basic need, such as food, medicine or health care in order to provide food for another family member.

Regarding households seeking or receiving food assistance:

- 74% of respondents who sought or received assistance turned to the government in some way for this assistance. Respondents who had children in the household were more likely to have sought or received government assistance than those without children in the household.

Further, the poll revealed that among those who sought or received food assistance in the previous 12 months, assistance came from the following sources:

- 74% from a government program
- 53% from a family member
- 53% from a local food bank
- 38% from a church or house of worship
- 35% from a neighbor or friend
- 21% from a community garden
- 26% from another source

Accessing food assistance can often be problematic because of barriers such as:

- Income eligibility for programs
- Exhausted food supplies
- Hours of operation for food assistance services
- Age restrictions for access to programs and services
- Transportation to locations providing food assistance services
- Location of those services

To maintain their cognitive and physical health children, youth and older adults (and their family members and friends) must understand how to acquire information on nutritional needs. The survey found that many respondents lack this essential knowledge:

- 24% of adults nationwide do not know how to access information about the unique nutrition needs of children, youth, and older adults. Younger adults ages 18 to 34, and older adults age 55 and older were least likely of all age groups to agree they know how to access information about such needs.

When asked about public support for federal food programs, the survey found:

- 70% of U.S. adults agree that policymakers should prevent cuts to existing federal food assistance programs for children, youth and older adults. Respondents with children in their households were more likely to agree than those without children in their households.

Experience with Lack of Food



1 in 3

Nearly 1 in 3 adults had experience with/concern about lack of food among their family, friends or neighbors.

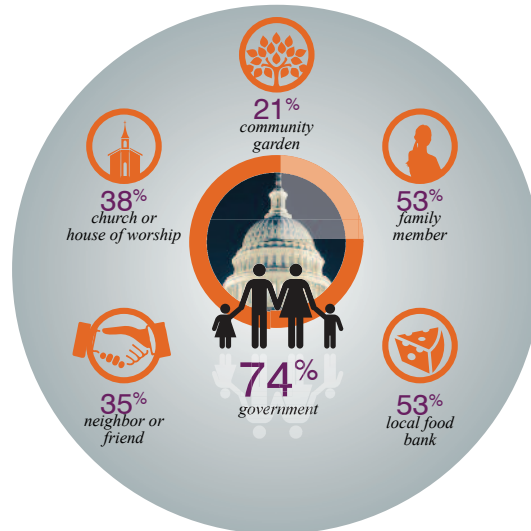


1 in 10

1 in 10 adults went without a basic need (such as food, medicine or health care) in order to provide food for another family member.

Households Seeking or Receiving Food Assistance

Of those who sought and/or received assistance, nearly 74% turned to the government in some way for this assistance. Many sought support from additional sources as shown. Families with children were even more likely to have sought and/or received assistance.



Public Support for Federal Food Programs



70%

70% of U.S. adults agree that policymakers should prevent cuts to existing federal food assistance programs for children, youth and older adults.

Knowledge About Nutritional Needs



24%

Nationwide, nearly one fourth of U.S. adults do not know how to access information on the unique nutritional needs of children, youth, and older adults.

Olivia and Richard

For much of her adult life, Olivia had known adversity. But the greatest test of her spirit and endurance would come at the age of 53 when she became permanent caregiver for her three-month-old grandson, Richard.

The story of how Richard came to be in Olivia's care was a tragedy in itself.

The baby's father, Olivia's son, had served in the military, including an 18-month tour in Iraq. When he returned to the States, he had changed. No longer the responsible, patriotic young man Olivia had known, he was angry

and troubled; after being discharged from the Army, he turned violent. In the course of a robbery attempt, which also involved his wife, he killed a man. With both her son and daughter-in-law incarcerated, Olivia stepped in to care for her tiny grandson.



Photo by Olivia Chase

The timing was tough for Olivia: she had already raised two other sons and had two other grandchildren. In addition, she had suffered an accident on the job while working as a nuclear medicine tech and had become disabled. For some time, she had been struggling to live on the income from her disability payment, and had moved in with a friend, sleeping on her floor. Olivia knew that her meager funds would not cover her grandson's food and other necessities, but she was determined to care for him.

A long-time activist, Olivia sought advice from an old friend, Jim Graham, who serves on the District of Columbia's City Council. She says that Jim "firmly and fairly" insisted that she seek help from the City and pointed her to the Columbia Heights Collaborative. Ruled ineligible for SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) because of her disability payment, Olivia applied to the WIC (Women, Infants and Children) program to cover Richard's formula, baby food, and other nutrition needs. She also received help in enrolling Richard in Medicaid.

But then, Olivia notes, it was the community who embraced her. Martha's Table, a valued local resource, came to her aid with groceries and clothing. Richard was enrolled in the organization's day care center, and only recently left there to attend the preschool at Francis-Stevens Educational Campus.

Olivia continues to rely on local food sources, including So Others May Eat, the Mount Pleasant Baptist Church, and SHARE. This year, Olivia prepared her Thanksgiving meal from a food basket she received from a local program. Olivia is enrolled in the Grandparent Caregivers Program, administered by the DC Child and Family Services Agency and receives a small stipend that helps her afford to care for Richard. She is also working with LIFT, a program that arranged for her to work one-on-one with a student at American University in negotiating a dispute with her current landlord.

As the saying goes, "it takes a village to raise a child." Martha's Table, So Others May Eat, SHARE, and the Mount Pleasant Baptist Church make up a large part of Olivia and Richard's village—and they are grateful to have such a wonderful support system. Still, it takes a lot of work for this grandmother to keep things together. The payments Olivia receives are not automatic, her food resources are scattered and barely adequate, and her disability makes everything harder. But if you meet Olivia and talk with her, she expresses only gratitude to all the organizations that help her survive. She says: "I don't have a sense of entitlement, but I am grateful for the support."

The survey responses point to major challenges facing our country's families, particularly with regard to their younger and older family members. But if the survey statistics show that families are struggling with hunger issues, the numbers also tell another story. The vast majority of Americans are united in their support for protecting federal food programs for our most vulnerable bookend generations. Moreover, in times of need, family members care for each other, placing the needs of others before their own. They too worry about the struggles of their friends and neighbors. Above all, families are resourceful.

To eliminate food insecurity, we must draw on the capabilities and creativity of all Americans. Every generation has its own strengths and inspirations. By working together, we can leverage these assets, combat hunger, and empower our families and neighbors to not only survive, but thrive.

This report identifies ways to effectively address nutrition problems using innovative intergenerational strategies. It lays out a set of recommendations that invite our policymakers, business and community leaders, and advocates to:

- Directly engage older and younger community members in tackling the hunger and nutrition challenges our country faces
- View people of different generations as problem-solvers and sources of support for each other
- Recast single-age interventions as integrated opportunities that improve health, stimulate learning, strengthen communities, and save money
- Cultivate the leadership qualities that exist in people of all ages

Now is the time to champion new strategies by engaging people of all ages to tackle food insecurity.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Protect and Strengthen Support for Critical Federal Food Programs for Low-Income Children, Youth, Older Adults, and Families

- Protect Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and other nutrition programs from negative structural changes, budget cuts and block grant proposals. Eliminate arbitrary eligibility exclusions like barring many legal immigrant adults from the program, and barriers to enrollment such as requiring people to re-enroll in SNAP if they move short distances away, like across county lines.² Avoid denying an entire household SNAP benefits if the head of household does not meet work requirements.
- Make SNAP benefits adequate to meet nutrition needs throughout the month. Restore the SNAP benefit increase scheduled to be terminated in November 2013.

Expand Access to and Availability of Critical Federal Food Programs

- Make sure participation rates are high among low-income intergenerational families.
- Improve outreach and access to federal food programs by streamlining enrollment, simplifying applications, and removing barriers, such as requiring in-person office visits for re-enrollment.

- Increase availability of federal food programs for children and youth. Implement the Breakfast in the Classroom program to ensure all children, regardless of family income, start their day with a nutritious meal.
- Expand the number of after-school and summer food program sites. Provide technical assistance and start-up grants, subsidize transportation, and reward states for finding innovative ways to increase program participation and close the hunger gap.
- Increase availability and access to federal food programs for older adults. Support targeted SNAP outreach to seniors.
- Promote the expansion of the Commodity Supplemental Food Program to reach seniors in all 50 states. Increase food distribution through The Emergency Food Assistance Program.
- Track and keep pace with demographic changes to ensure adequate federal funding for home-delivered and congregate meals.

Increase Income and Access to Supports for Low-Income Families

- Encourage states to develop measures to support employment for low-income families through workforce training programs and innovative solutions, such as work-sharing.
- Ensure unemployment laws and other programs allow work-sharers and part-time employees to qualify for partial unemployment benefits.
- Support clear pathways for cross-certification or categorical eligibility between nutrition programs and other benefits, such as the Low-Income Energy Assistance Program, Medicaid, Supplemental Security Income (SSI), and Temporary Assistance to Needy Families.
- Support, improve, and promote outreach about tax credits benefiting low-income families, including the Earned Income Tax Credit and Child Tax Credit.

Engage the Business Community

- Educate company leadership and employees about how supporting food assistance programs help business by improving community relations, burnishing the company image, and providing tax benefits.
- Encourage employee volunteerism by holding company-wide volunteer days or offering time off for employees to volunteer with food assistance programs.
- Encourage employee contributions to food assistance programs by offering to match such contributions.
- Establish an employee wellness program that promotes healthy eating and lifestyles among employees.
- Establish a worksite farmers' market where employees can conveniently purchase healthy foods, such as fruits and vegetables.
- Encourage healthy lifestyles by covering an additional percentage of the cost of health insurance premiums for employees who meet biometric markers, such as a healthy body mass index (BMI), and stable blood pressure and blood sugar readings.
- Offer reimbursements to employees for personal investments in their own health, such as consulting with a registered dietitian or employing a personal trainer.

Support and Promote Approaches Encouraging Healthy and Nutritious Diets

- Ensure SNAP benefits are adequate for families to purchase healthy food.
- Ensure schools comply with new nutrition standards.
- Encourage USDA to move forward on rules designed to make food in child care meals and snacks funded by the federal government healthier as well as rules limiting what food schools can sell or offer outside of the federally funded meals programs.
- Expand support for The Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program and The Emergency Food Assistance Program that provide nutritious options for low-income people of all ages.
- Support efforts to provide produce and other healthy food options in “food deserts” by making fresh fruits, vegetables and nutritious foods available in corner stores.
- Champion nonprofit grocery stores, farmers markets, local vegetable carts and “stock box neighborhood groceries.”
- Increase federal reimbursement rates to providers to accurately reflect the total costs of providing nutritious meals.
- Promote community gardens through collecting and sharing best practices and offering local tax incentives.

Promote Coordination of Food Programs to Better Serve Families

- Promote coordination across federal nutrition programs to better serve family members of all ages.
- Encourage states to develop comprehensive intergenerational strategies to:
 - Help older adults and children and youth gain access to and participate in nutrition programs.
 - Improve delivery and coordination of nutrition and other assistance programs to better meet the needs of family members of all ages.
- Modify age-restricted federal food programs to incorporate comprehensive, integrated, intergenerational approaches.
- Include incentives for using intergenerational approaches in federal legislation, such as those in the Older Americans Act, that encourage joint meal programs with schools.
- Promote co-location of children and older adult food programs so the different generations can interact and bond with each other.
- Remove barriers to the creation of intergenerational shared sites.
- Change the perception of school cafeterias from “filling stations” to intergenerational learning laboratories.
- Replace the traditional “senior center models” with ones that provide nutritious food while engaging older adults in service and other intergenerational opportunities.
- Engage students in volunteer opportunities where they can serve and learn from older adults in food and nutrition settings.
- Position older adults as educators and advocates for children’s nutritional health, and students as educators and advocates for senior nutritional health.
- Involve National Service programs, such as Senior Corps, AmeriCorps and Learn and Serve, in focusing on intergenerational nutrition needs in under-served communities.

Program Profile: St. Louis Meal Runners

Program Name: Meal Runners (Part of the St. Louis-area Meals on Wheels, est. in 1973)

Type of Program: home-delivered meals

Location: Lemay, Missouri

Participants: high school service learning students, older adult volunteers, homebound older adults

Number served: 120 homebound older adults served nutritious meals Monday through Friday

Pamela Guest grew increasingly concerned as she watched her volunteers lift the heavy meal carriers and coolers, and place them in their vehicles. It was tough work. Each volunteer was responsible for delivering a hot meal, fruit and milk daily to 16 homebound adults. Without these dedicated volunteers, homebound and frail elderly would not have the hot, nutritionally balanced meals they needed to live independently in their own homes.



Courtesy of St. Louis Area Meals on Wheels

As administrator for the South County Senior Resource Center in Lemay, Missouri, Pamela knew that her volunteers were dedicated to their task and rarely complained. But she was also aware that while their spirits were willing, many of their bodies were struggling under the heavy lifting. After all, the majority of her volunteers were in their 70s.

“Too bad you can’t use kids to help deliver meals,” a friend said in passing one day. That chance remark gave Pamela the solution she needed. “When my friend said that, a light bulb went off,” Pamela explains. “I thought, ‘Why can’t we find a way to get young people involved?’”

Inspired, Pamela contacted the principal of nearby Bayless High School to discuss the possibility. During the conversation, the principal mentioned that the school already offered a class called Student Service Learning that emphasized service to the community. Perhaps the class could give students the opportunity to help deliver meals and earn school credit at the same time.

Following several months of meetings, paperwork and training, Meal Runners was launched—and proved so successful it’s now in its seventh year. Today, over 30 young people take part each year.

All volunteers—students and older adults alike—receive training on intergenerational dynamics. The training helps sensitize them to avoid negative stereotypes.

“The older adults and teens work together in two-person teams to deliver meals to 120 homebound elders in the area,” Pamela notes. “The older volunteers pick up their student partners at school and bring them to the senior center where the students now do the lifting and packing of meal carriers and coolers. Then together, the two-person teams deliver the meals.”

"The feedback has been extremely positive," Pamela says. "The program has helped break down intergenerational barriers and brought people of all ages together to help their hungry and elderly neighbors."

"Many of the older adults in the program—both volunteers and the homebound—used to be leery or afraid of kids. Now, they see that young people's hearts and minds are in a very positive place and that these kids are headed in the right direction."

"One of our drivers, Mr. Unger, always talks about how much he loves the program and how it's opened up new adventures for him. He's been paired with students from different cultures—Bosnian, Korean, Hispanic—that he might never have been exposed to. And, he's become a mentor for a number of youngsters. Kids are interested in his life story and opinions; they ask for his advice, and he helps guide them in a positive direction. Last year, several students nominated him for the MetLife Foundation Mentor Award. He won! That award means a great deal to him."

"Meal Runners has had a profound impact on the student volunteers as well. Those who may have started out volunteering in order to earn a grade, now see the need in our community. They recognize how important it is to give back. They are also learning to see older adults in a new and respectful way. They realize that not everyone has someone to look after them, but that everyone needs a level of care and concern. Because of their involvement in Meal Runners, some students decided to pursue gerontology after graduation. One even interned with our agency's nutrition department."

Pamela, too, has received national and state awards for "Best Intergenerational Program."

"The change in mindset is so important! We're producing the next generation of volunteers, and these kids are setting a great example for their peers and older adults alike!"

Driving for Miss Lola

Right after Meal Runners began, "Miss Lola", just home from the hospital, began receiving home delivered meals. She lived alone, had no children or living relatives, and seemed to have given up. Her loneliness was evident in the way she lived: When students first started showing up to deliver her meals at midday, Miss Lola answered the door in her nightgown, her hair unkempt. She received her meals in silence and closed the door. But the student volunteers had been taught they should make an effort to speak with their homebound neighbors. One day, a young female volunteer gently asked, "Miss Lola, could I give you a hug?"

That simple gesture turned Miss Lola's life around. She hugged the student, and both began to cry. More important, they began to talk. The next day, when the student and her older volunteer partner drove to Miss Lola's, they were astonished to see her dressed and well-coiffed. From then on, Miss Lola always wanted her hug. Those who knew her said the end of her life was happier because of the care she'd received from the kids.

Endnotes

- ¹ U.S. Department of Agriculture. Coleman-Jensen, A., Nord, M., Andrews, M., & Carlson, S. "Household Food Security in the United States in 2011." (September 2012)
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