



Media Release

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One-Third of Older Arkansans Live with Food Insecurity

More than 160,000 seniors in Arkansas don't have enough to eat or are at risk of going hungry, according to a study released by the Arkansas Department of Human Services (DHS) Division of Aging and Adult Services (DAAS).

This number makes Arkansas one of the worst states in the nation for seniors living with food insecurity, which is defined as not having nutritionally adequate food in sufficient quantities. Food insecurity is associated with many negative health effects, including malnutrition, cardiovascular disease and extended hospital stays.

"At first glance, these numbers were discouraging," said Krista Hughes, director of DAAS. "No one should be hungry, especially our seniors. But now that we know which counties have the most need, we can work aggressively to connect seniors there with help."

The study identifies several reasons why so many seniors are living without enough nutritious food. Some lack transportation while others struggle to pay for increasingly expensive food or live in rural areas with few food stores.

African Americans, Hispanics, seniors who are divorced, separated, or widowed; and seniors with disabilities are much more likely to face food insecurity than others.

DAAS is working with several groups across Arkansas to fight the problem of senior hunger. The Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program is a USDA-funded initiative administered by the Area Agency on Aging and DAAS. The program provides low-income seniors with \$50 coupons to spend on locally grown produce at farmers' markets. The DHS Division of County Operations also is partnering with senior centers across Arkansas to encourage more eligible seniors to apply for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits.

In addition, DAAS continues to contract with providers across the state to serve meals to those 60 and up as allowed by The Older American Act Meal Program. In the past five years, 19 million meals have been served to Arkansas seniors through this program.

"We have had several seniors tell us that these meals are a real help since many can't prepare their own food," said Randi Harville with Carelink, a community advocate for seniors. "Since many of them live alone, it helps them retain a little independence and gives them peace of mind."

For more information, contact Amy Webb at the Department of Human Services. To view the report online, click here:

<http://www.daas.ar.gov/pdf/Senior%20Hunger%20in%20Arkansas%202013.pdf>