

Senior Nutrition: Consumer Survey Results

January 1, 2015 – April 30, 2015

Synopsis

Background

Through contracts with purchase of service (POS) agencies, Dane County Department of Human Services provides senior dining centers and home-delivered meals to seniors in Dane County with the goal of maintaining older adults in their own homes and communities.

Funding

Funding is provided under the Older Americans Act (OAA) and through the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), in addition to participant donations and local municipal funding.

Through a State “Revitalization” grant from the Bureau of Aging and Disability Resources, Dane County developed, piloted, and implemented a new model for senior dining in 2014-2015 called, “My Meal, My Way” at two restaurant locations: Cranberry Creek and Fink’s. Consistent with the Older Americans Act intent for the Senior Nutrition Program, the new model promotes good nutrition and an opportunity for decreasing isolation, encourages meaningful engagement and investment in the program by senior volunteers and through increased senior donations, and preserves seniors’ autonomy by providing choices in meals and dining hours. Due to the success of these sites, in partnership with DeForest Family Restaurant, a third My Meal, My Way program opened in late 2015.

Eligibility

Senior dining center services are available to any person age 60 and older on a donation basis. There are 27 sites throughout Dane County where a Noon meal is served one or more days per week; one site has a Monday evening meal each week, as well as, a Saturday evening meal one time per month. Twenty-three (23) sites require a reservation one day in advance. At the time of the survey there were 25 sites; since then, in addition to the DeForest Family Restaurant program, a congregate site opened at Meadowood Neighborhood Center in Madison.

Home-delivered meals are available to frail, homebound Dane County adults age 60 and older who have no other source for their noon meal and who meet the requirements under the Wisconsin Aging Network Policy Manual - Chapter 8 Nutrition Program Operations. Meals are delivered from 16 different sites and are delivered five days per week in most areas. Home Health United Meals on Wheels delivers seven days per week.

Study

The purpose of the survey was to determine whether Dane County participants were satisfied with the home-delivered and congregate meal programs.

Measures

The study, as it did in 2006 and 2011, used two survey instruments – one for congregate meal participants and one for home-delivered meal participants – that were based in part on the work of the Performance Outcome Measures Project (POMP) undertaken by the Administration on Aging in conjunction with Westat. In addition, the surveys included the Nutritional Risk Assessment adapted from the Nutrition Screening Initiative, a project of the American Academy of Family Physicians, The American Diabetic Association, and the National Council on the Aging, Inc.

In 2015, the State of Wisconsin moved to a standardized set of survey items that were to be included by all aging units on an annual basis. This was to allow the State to collect data that could be used in a variety of ways to illustrate the program's impact on the lives of older adults throughout the State. Aging units were given flexibility to include other questions of local interest and to modify the formatting of the survey.

The 2015 survey form included the questions and responses required by the State of Wisconsin along with updated revisions to the POMP and the Nutritional Risk Assessment. The survey instrument was shared with and modified based on input from Sara Koenig, Elder Nutrition Program Manager, WI Bureau of Aging and Disability Resources.

Translation

The survey was made available in Spanish and English.

Survey Population

The survey population was all persons who received senior nutrition services between January 1, 2015 and April 30, 2015, who were registered in the Social Assistance Management Systems (SAMS) database maintained by the State, who had a valid mailing address, and were still living at the time of the survey. A random sample of this population was pulled.

Survey Method

A total of 2,298 surveys were mailed June 8-10, 2015. Surveys were sent out in DCDHS Department envelopes. A postage-paid, self-addressed return envelope was included.

Response Rate

The overall response rate was 38% with 836 useable surveys returned out of 2,195 that made it to potential respondents. A response rate of 20% is considered acceptable for a one-time mail survey.

Findings

The full report may be found on the County web site at: <https://danecountyhumanservices.org/reports.aspx>. Briefly, some of the findings include:

- Participation in the Senior Dining Center program is not reflective of the estimated Dane County population age 60 and older. Persons who were considered Asian were under-represented in the Senior Dining Center program. Persons who were African-American or Hispanic/Latino participated in higher percentages than their numbers in the Dane County population.
- Overall, the Senior Dining Center Program was rated favorably by 92% of the survey respondents with 36% rating the program as "Excellent," 41% as "Very Good," and 15% as "Good."
- The home-delivered meals program was rated positively by 90% of the survey respondents with 28% rating it as "Excellent," 36% as "Very Good," and 26% as "Good."
- Respondents to the home-delivered meals survey indicated that having meals delivered in person offered someone to talk to (48.8%), a sense of safety and security (45.0%), and a link to get more support if needed (34.9%).

- Survey respondents rated the restaurant sites more favorably in terms of the way the food tastes, smells, looks, and with the way it was cooked than did survey respondents who attended a standard senior dining center site.
- Respondents to the senior dining center survey who indicated a race/ethnicity other than White, were significantly less likely than their White counterparts to indicate that they attend a senior dining center to visit with friends.
- Food security or lack of it, seemed to be a significant factor in frequency of attendance at a senior dining center.
- Survey respondents who attended a senior dining center once per week or more compared with those who attended less than once per week were significantly more likely to indicate they had skipped a meal during the past month because they had to use the money for other living expenses; that if they didn't receive these meals, they would not have at least one hot, freshly prepared meal daily; they don't always have enough money to buy the food they need; and of all the food they eat in a day, over half was eaten at a senior dining center.
- Baby Boomers, born between 1946 and 1964, comprised slightly over 30% of senior dining center participants during the study period. Respondents of this generation were significantly more likely to attend a senior dining center in order to make ends meet. There were other significant differences between this generation and others in that:
 - They do not attend a senior dining site more frequently due to financial concerns.
 - They are less satisfied with portion sizes and that the staff and volunteers at senior dining sites are friendly and respectful.
 - They are more likely to eat fewer than 2 meals per day and to not always have enough money to buy the food they need.
 - They were more likely to suggest having more fresh foods as a means to make the nutrition program better.