

# Calling On Congress to Support Nutritious Meals for Older Adults



**Commissioner Lorraine Cortés-Vázquez (left) and Senator Kirsten Gillibrand (right) calling on Congress to increase Older Americans Act nutrition program funding.**

We all have much to be thankful for this holiday season, especially having the opportunity to spend time with family and friends, catching up over dinner. As we are all celebrating, I take care knowing that the many older New Yorkers who are food insecure - during the holidays and throughout the year - can receive hot meals from the Department for the Aging's nutrition programs.

Access to food is a fundamental right. Sadly, for far too many older adults, it is a right that is not always within reach.

When the Older Americans Act was passed over 50 years ago, one of its main components was the nutrition programs for low-income older residents, with the goal of reducing hunger across the country. It was this important act that led to the opening of older adult centers and food programs like home delivered meals that feed millions of older Americans today.

In November, as the holiday season began, I was proud to join Senator Kirsten Gillibrand, New York Office for the Aging Acting Direc-

tor Greg Olsen, and Executive Director of Citymeals on Wheels Beth Shapiro, for a press conference calling for an increase in Federal funding for nutrition programs. In a bipartisan letter, Senator Gillibrand and dozens of her colleagues urged the Senate and House Appropriations Committees to provide an additional \$1.9 billion in funding for the Older Americans Act nutrition programs.

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated food insecurity among the city's older adult population. Not only were older adults the most vulnerable to the virus, they were also hit hard financially and asked to shelter at home, physically limiting their access to food. Today, with rising costs of food, and a growing aging population, non-profit service providers also faced challenges to make sure they can provide the same number of meals in their communities.

Here in New York, there are over 300 older adult centers across the five boroughs that give residents the opportunity to live active and independent lives. A critical service they provide is congregate meals - hot, nutritious meals, served on-site that older New Yorkers can enjoy with other center members. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, over seven-million meals were served by our older adult center network, and some of our most vulnerable residents, those who are homebound,

had four-million meals delivered to them.

Home-delivered and congregate meals are cooked to ensure healthy diets, and are certified by NYC Aging registered dietitians, so that they provide a minimum of one-third of the necessary daily nutrients of vitamins, minerals, proteins, fat, and carbohydrates our bodies need.

Older adult center meals and home delivered meals programs are more than just ways for residents to receive nutritious food to eat. They also help reduce social isolation and gives us opportunities to connect them to other services and programs they may need.

With New York's older population expected to grow to 1.86 million by 2040, and with rising inflation, we believe the demand, and therefore funding for these meal programs needs to increase.

I urge Congress to prioritize nutrition services for older adults and increase the Older Americans Act nutrition programs to support Americans who rely on these programs.



**NYC Department for the Aging  
Commissioner Lorraine  
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