

# BUILDING CAPACITY, SPREADING THE WORD



October 2012

## Recommendations on Leveraging Food Resources for Philadelphia's Seniors

**SENIOR HUNGER TASK FORCE**

**MAYOR'S COMMISSION ON AGING**

PRESENTED TO:

**MICHAEL A. NUTTER, MAYOR & THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA**

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## TASK FORCE BACKGROUND

Consisting of representatives from the aging network, social services, emergency food programs, and other stakeholder organizations, the Mayor's Commission on Aging Senior Hunger Task Force formed in January 2012 following a citywide assessment of resources and needs related to senior hunger conducted in 2011. The Task Force met six times to advise the City on opportunities for building capacity to address unmet need and to better share information about existing resources, including home-delivered meals, healthy food incentive programs, and public benefits for seniors.

The Task Force hopes that the following recommendations are only the beginning of further citywide collaboration around solutions for senior hunger in Philadelphia. As seniors' experiences indicate, as well as the experiences of those who love, care for, and live beside them, "senior hunger" has neither simple causes nor solutions. While it intersects with physical and dietary challenges often unique to older adults, senior hunger is inextricable from other issues that have impact across generations: financial security, safe, accessible, public transportation, and access to healthy, affordable foods across all of Philadelphia's neighborhoods.

A holistic framework for viewing the causes, consequences, and solutions for senior hunger is not only essential to promote within the aging network but also within dialogues about public health, policy, and community development writ large. Advocating for solutions collaboratively, both within and without City departments, will not just give rise to opportunities to meet seniors' needs, but also to create stronger, healthier communities for people of all ages.

## FOOD, POVERTY AND AN AGING POPULATION

**“Adequate nutrition is necessary for health, functionality, and the ability to remain at home in the community.” Gordon Jensen, *Nutrition and Healthy Aging in the Community*<sup>1</sup>**

### The Need

Across the country, older adults have experienced higher levels of food insecurity since the beginning of the “Great Recession” in 2008.<sup>2</sup> Food insecurity, defined by the USDA as lack of consistent access to adequate food for an active, healthy life,<sup>3</sup> rose by 26% for Americans over 60 between 2007 and 2009—and given continued weakness of the economy, rates are not expected to improve anytime soon.<sup>4</sup>

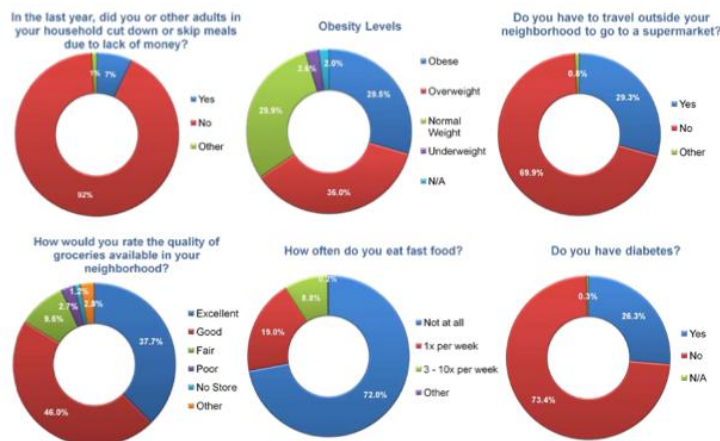
Philadelphia is no exception to these challenges. The AARP estimated that approximately 18% of Philadelphia’s seniors were food insecure or marginally food insecure in 2009.<sup>5</sup> Seniors on fixed incomes struggle to accommodate dietary restrictions while food costs rise; many also often face limited mobility, making independent grocery shopping and cooking wearing or even impossible. In Philadelphia, senior hunger hits low-income communities of color the hardest. African American and Latino seniors reported highest rates of cutting meals due to lack of money and of struggling to cook for themselves, with the highest need in North and Southwest Philadelphia.<sup>6</sup> However, juggling food with medical costs and difficulty cooking or shopping independently makes for challenges for seniors across income levels and neighborhoods.

Senior food insecurity in Philadelphia relate especially to the physical and financial accessibility of

healthy food. 65% of older adults in Philadelphia report being overweight or obese, and 56% reported eating two or fewer servings of fruits or vegetables per day.<sup>7</sup> While senior hunger has traditionally given rise to images of small, frail seniors, the reality in Philadelphia and across the country is that with rising obesity rates, increasingly seniors in need of services are not just “tiny and frail; they are [also] large and frail.”<sup>8</sup> The relationship between obesity, functional decline, and homebound status points to the importance of long-term, preventative solutions in community planning and policy in addition to expanding existing resources to meet current homebound seniors’ needs.

### Food Access, Health, & Nutrition

A Survey of Philadelphia Residents Age 60 and Older



Data Source: 2010 Public Health Management Corporation Household Health Survey

PCA  
Public Health Management Corporation

<sup>1</sup> Jensen, Gordon L. “Introduction,” *Nutrition and Healthy Aging in the Community: Workshop Summary*. The National Academies Press, Washington, D.C.

<sup>2</sup> Ziliak, James P. “Food Insecurity Among Older Adults.” AARP Foundation. August 2010.

<sup>3</sup> Food Security in the United States: Measuring Household Food Security”. USDA. Retrieved 25 September 2012.

<sup>4</sup> Ziliak 2011.

<sup>5</sup> Includes Wilmington, DE and Camden, NJ. Ziliak, James P. and Craig Gunderson. AARP, 2010.

<sup>6</sup> Glicksman, Allen and Kate Clark (2011). “Research Report from Age-Friendly Philadelphia: Food Access and Older Philadelphians.” Philadelphia Corporation for Aging, March 15, 2011.

<sup>7</sup> Glicksman and Clark, 2011.

<sup>8</sup> Jensen, 2005, *Nutrition and Healthy Aging*, 24.

## The Resources

### SNAP

There are a variety of resources that currently help alleviate senior food insecurity in Philadelphia. The most far-reaching of these is the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly known as food stamps, in which 18.2% of Philadelphians over 65 were enrolled in 2010.<sup>9</sup> While seniors qualify for diverse benefit levels according to their income, SNAP helps low-income seniors allocate money for housing, utilities or other expenses that they otherwise would need to spend on food. SNAP is an essential resource in a time of rising food costs, particularly for seniors who must buy more expensive foods to accommodate dietary restrictions as they age.

Benefits Data Trust, which operates a benefits outreach campaign called BenePhilly, estimates that approximately 60,000 seniors are eligible for SNAP but are not currently receiving benefits. Barriers to higher enrollment are many, including stigma about receiving public benefits, an often daunting, complicated application process, low awareness about eligibility, and language barriers. However, since its inception in 2008, BenePhilly has successfully completed 10,000 SNAP applications on behalf of seniors across the city by contacting eligible individuals over 60 through direct mail and phone calls. The Greater Philadelphia Coalition Against Hunger also operates a Food Stamp Hotline, which since 2010 has assisted nearly 3,000 seniors with the SNAP application process. In-person support is often conducted by social workers at senior centers and senior housing facilities.

### Congregate and Home-Delivered Meals

Senior centers also play a major role in meeting seniors' nutrition needs in Philadelphia. Philadelphia Corporation for Aging (PCA) funds 35 congregate meals programs at 23 senior centers and 11 satellite centers in the city. For those who cannot cook for themselves or access congregate meals in their neighborhoods, home-delivered meals provide an essential source of nutrition. PCA serves home-delivered meals to approximately 5,000 seniors across the city. To be eligible, seniors must qualify for a care plan through PCA determined by financial criteria and clinical assessment, or be enrolled in a PCA-supported in-home support program operated by a senior center. PCA also makes referrals to several volunteer-supported, community-based programs that have a combined capacity of around 4,000. The service areas, menus, and cost of meals available through volunteer-supported programs vary by program, though two of the highest-capacity programs, Aid For Friends and MANNA, offer free meals.

### Box Programs and the Emergency Food Network

There are over 500 pantries, food cupboards, and other emergency feeding programs in Philadelphia, many of whom regularly serve senior clients. Over the past decade, the number of seniors receiving food from food pantries and soup kitchens through the State Food Purchase Program (SFPP) has increased nearly four fold, with 49,000 seniors receiving food from SFPP in 2010.<sup>10</sup> The federally-funded Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP), managed by Philabundance, currently provides a little under 10,000 boxes of shelf-stable foods per month for seniors who are at or below 130% of the poverty line. CSFP distributes boxes at over 90 agencies across the city, including senior centers, senior housing, and food cupboards. The Jewish Relief Agency also delivers approximately monthly food boxes to approximately 4,000 senior households in Philadelphia using volunteer support.

<sup>9</sup> "2010 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates". <http://www.census.gov/acs/www/>

<sup>10</sup> Greater Philadelphia Coalition Against Hunger, 2012. <http://www.hungercoalition.org/issue-state-food>



## Farmer's Markets

Farmer's markets can be an important way for seniors to access fresh fruits and vegetables in their neighborhoods; in 2011 approximately 18% of shoppers at markets supported by The Food Trust were over 65.<sup>11</sup> There are two primary resources that connect low-income seniors to farmer's markets in the city at lower costs. Philly Food Bucks, operated by The Food Trust in partnership with the Philadelphia Department of Public Health, allows SNAP-recipients to get \$2 back for every \$5 spent at 25 participating farmer's markets. The Senior Farmer's Market Nutrition Program, funded by the Pennsylvania State Department of Agriculture and operated by PCA, additionally distributes \$20 worth of vouchers to income eligible seniors during the summertime. The vouchers, which are distributed at senior centers and PCA, are valid until November 30th and can be spent at farmer's markets or other produce stands on fresh fruits and vegetables grown or growable in Pennsylvania. In 2011, vouchers were distributed to over 36,000 older Philadelphians.

Some farmer's markets also host stands at senior centers and housing complexes on a seasonal, monthly basis. Additionally, the West Philadelphia Fresh Food Hub, a mobile grocery store that offers farm fresh products, grew in 2012 out of a partnership with Sarah Allen Senior Home and has partnered with senior centers and other housing facilities in West Philadelphia to sell produce on a weekly basis and offer nutrition education and cooking demonstrations.

## Community Gardens

Following World War II and throughout the 60s and 70s, many African American migrants from the South, Puerto Ricans, and Southeast Asians brought gardening traditions with them to Philadelphia that became an important factor in their quality of life in the city.<sup>12</sup> In recent years, more connections have grown between community gardens and senior-serving agencies. In 2010, Nationalities Services Center founded a garden on a site close to its senior center in North Philadelphia that has been a model for engaging seniors in gardening efforts. Grow for a Friend, operated by the Klein-JCC's Retired Senior Volunteer Program, helps develop raised beds at partner agencies so that senior gardeners may harvest fresh produce for themselves. In addition to the Klein-JCC, South Philadelphia Older Adult Center (SPOAC), two Salvation Army facilities in West Philadelphia, and other sites have built raised beds for senior gardeners with the support of Grow For a Friend. Several other sites, including Guild House West in North Philadelphia, Lutheran Settlement House in Fishtown, and Mantua Presbyterian apartments (through a partnership with Drexel University) have also initiated projects to revitalize gardening at their sites in order to increase seniors' access to fresh food and ability to participate in gardening activities.

<sup>11</sup> Farmers Market Customer Survey Demographic Results, 2011. The Food Trust.

<sup>12</sup> Vitiello, Domenic and Michael Nairn. "Community Gardening in Philadelphia: 2008 Harvest Report." Penn Planning and Urban Studies, University of Pennsylvania. October 2009.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

As Philadelphia's population ages and economic challenges continue, hunger and diet-related health conditions among seniors too run the risk of expanding unless solutions are sought across sectors and seniors' voices are incorporated into broad dialogues about community food security. It is essential for the City to share information about existing resources, build capacity to address unmet need, and foster creative partnerships to address the underlying causes of senior hunger in ways that acknowledge both the demographic diversity of seniors in Philadelphia and the diversity of their needs. The following recommendations seek to inform strategies for the City to tackle senior hunger in collaboration with stakeholder organizations in both the short and long-term.

### Information-Sharing

#### ➤ **Create a guide to food programs and resources available for Philadelphia seniors.**

- **Goal:** Create and disseminate a senior-friendly guide with information about food resources, available in print and online formats. The guide should be disseminated to seniors through culturally appropriate outreach, aging network service providers, and venues that reach caregivers.
- **Issue Addressed:** Many seniors do not know about the range of food resources available. Isolated older seniors (70+) in particular often have low levels of information access.
- **Outcome:** Centrally coordinated aggregation, dissemination, and updating of information about resources will contribute to improved accessibility of existing resources.

#### ➤ **Empower community leaders in high need areas to share information with seniors.**

- **Goal:** Conduct targeted outreach and training about food resources for community leaders by partnering with CDC's, faith communities, block captains, immigrant elder councils, and other groups that work closely with seniors in high need neighborhoods. Older adult leaders in particular should be empowered to share information with peers.
- **Issue Addressed:** Particularly in areas of highest food insecurity in North and Southwest Philadelphia, there is need for more effective, senior-centric delivery of information about food resources.
- **Outcome:** Training community leaders who connect regularly with seniors in high need neighborhoods, including older adult leaders, will leverage the power of one-on-one, peer relationships in order to share information about resources with seniors who are most likely to face food insecurity.

#### ➤ **Convene stakeholders to share opportunities for collaboration and coordinated advocacy.**

- **Goal:** Provide a forum for representatives from the aging network, food access organizations, and other service providers to regularly share information with each other about opportunities to collaborate and to act as a unified voice for senior hunger in Philadelphia in policy advocacy.
- **Issues Addressed:** While there are many strong organizations working on behalf of both aging and food access issues in Philadelphia, there is often little opportunity for advocates from different networks to plan and advocate collaboratively about senior food insecurity on a citywide level.
- **Outcome:** Regularly convening a coalition of relevant stakeholders will enable agencies to share information with each other about services, foster opportunities to build capacity through partnerships, and empower organizations and the City to respond collectively to city, state, and national policies that impact senior hunger.



## Capacity-Building

- **Connect existing fresh food resources to aging agencies in high need areas.**
  - **Goal:** Facilitate partnerships between grocers, farmer's markets, and mobile markets with senior centers and senior housing facilities to support innovative access models.
  - **Issues addressed:** Areas of high senior food insecurity in North Philadelphia and Southwest Philadelphia have low access to fresh, affordable food. In other parts of the city including the Northeast, fresh food may be available but less accessible for seniors unable to drive or shop for themselves.
  - **Outcome:** Centrally coordinating partnerships between aging agencies and food providers, from large grocery chains to farmer's markets, will lead to more solutions for reliable access points and/or delivery of healthy food to seniors.
- **Foster partnerships with formal service networks to build agency capacity and increase intergenerational awareness of senior hunger.**
  - **Goal:** Promote capacity-building volunteer opportunities related to senior hunger to formal service networks.
  - **Issues addressed:** Senior hunger issues—especially among the homebound and isolated—are often invisible to younger adults, leading to disconnects between resources and provider networks.
  - **Outcome:** Tapping into volunteers through AmeriCorps programs, the university and high school service-learning network, corporate groups, civic associations, and other service institutions will help raise intergenerational awareness about senior food access, build capacity through skills-based volunteers, and create a younger base for agencies that rely on volunteers for operational support. Project-based service learning partnerships with universities could also lead to opportunities for research on best practices and need.
- **Develop neighborhood-based volunteer infrastructure to expand home-delivered meals in high need areas.**
  - **Goal:** Support grassroots emergency food programs and other neighborhood-based organizations to increase their capacity to serve homebound seniors by developing volunteer infrastructure and creating links with existing home-delivered meals programs.
  - **Issues addressed:** Areas of high senior food insecurity in North Philadelphia and Southwest Philadelphia are the most underserved by volunteer-supported home-delivered meals programs.
  - **Outcome:** Developing volunteer infrastructure in high need areas by building on existing community networks as well as formal service programs will enable the emergency food network to serve seniors more effectively through home-deliveries and other supports.

## Research and Strategic Planning

### ➤ Conduct an in-depth study of senior hunger in Philadelphia.

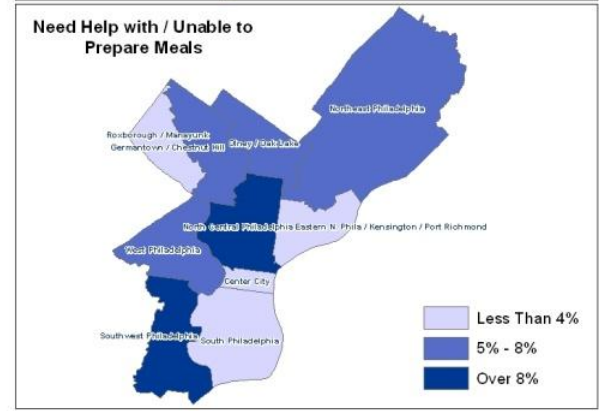
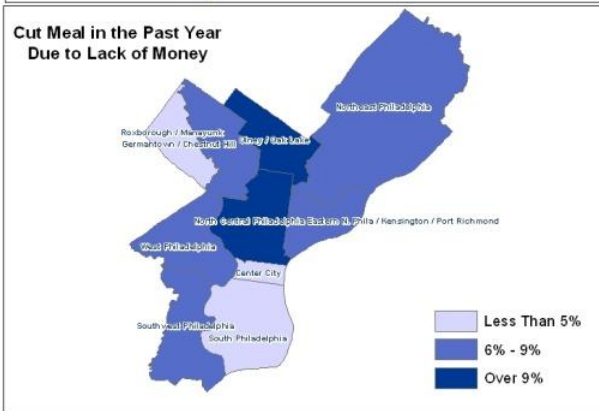
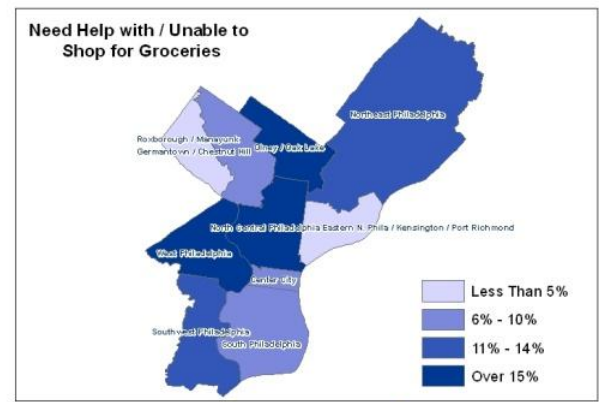
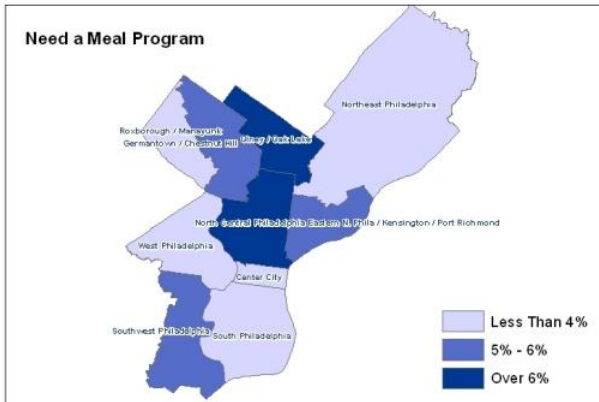
- **Goal:** Partner with a university or other research institution to conduct a survey of senior food insecurity in Philadelphia, including causes, consequences, and related circumstances, such as dietary needs and access to healthy food in neighborhoods.
- **Issues Addressed:** Existing data on senior food insecurity in Philadelphia is limited, especially on a neighborhood-based level and for non-English or Spanish-speaking populations.
- **Outcome:** A holistic picture of senior food insecurity in Philadelphia and related nutrition, health, and neighborhood food access issues will provide advocates, agencies, and City officials with a strong reference point for long-term planning and advocacy.

### ➤ Initiate a strategic planning process to guide long-term goals to address senior hunger.

- **Goal:** Set long-term goals for preventing and decreasing senior hunger in Philadelphia based on research and consideration of best practices.
- **Issues Addressed:** City departments and agencies from diverse sectors have a stake in meeting the food-related needs of older adults but require a centrally coordinated planning process in order to build consensus on unified goals.
- **Outcome:** Coordinated, citywide action steps to fight and prevent senior food insecurity based on a research-driven strategic plan will ensure efficient and effective alignment of resources in order to alleviate senior hunger in Philadelphia long-term.

## Appendix A: Maps

The following maps demonstrate food security needs among older adults in Philadelphia (60+) demonstrated by the Public Health Management Corporation's 2010 Household Health Survey.



Data Source: Public Health Management Corporation Household Health Survey

## Appendix B: Further Reading

- Glicksman, Allen and Kate Clark (2011). “Research Report from Age-friendly Philadelphia: Food Access and Older Philadelphians.” Philadelphia Corporation for Aging, March 15, 2011.
- “Elder-Accessible Gardening: A Community Building Option for Brownfields Redevelopment.” EPA fact sheet EPA 560-F-11-021, September 2011.  
<[http://www.epa.gov/brownfields/urbanag/pdf/elder\\_accessible\\_gardening.pdf](http://www.epa.gov/brownfields/urbanag/pdf/elder_accessible_gardening.pdf)>
- Ernst, Margaret. “Food, Seniors, and Service: Strategies for Innovating Home-Delivered Meals and Other Seniors Hunger Resources in Philadelphia.” Mayor’s Commission on Aging, December 2011.  
<[http://www.phila.gov/aging/pdfs/MOCHA\\_FoodSeniorsAndService\\_Dec2011.pdf](http://www.phila.gov/aging/pdfs/MOCHA_FoodSeniorsAndService_Dec2011.pdf)>
- Laying the Foundation for an Age-Friendly Philadelphia.* Philadelphia Corporation For Aging. June 2011.  
<[http://www.pcacares.org/pca\\_learn\\_White\\_Paper.aspx](http://www.pcacares.org/pca_learn_White_Paper.aspx)>
- Feeding America: National Report 2010.* Mathematica Policy Research. Feeding America. January 2010.
- Nutrition and Healthy Aging in the Community: Workshop Summary.* The National Academies Press. Washington, D.C., 2012.
- Vitiello, Domenic and Michael Nairn. “Community Gardening in Philadelphia: 2008 Harvest Report.” Penn Planning and Urban Studies, University of Pennsylvania. October 2009.
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- Wolfe, Wendy S., Edward A. Frongillo and Pascale Valois. “Understanding the Experience of Food Insecurity by Elders Suggests Ways to Improve its Measurement.” American Society for Nutritional Sciences. March 2003.
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