

# CRS Report for Congress

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## Older Americans Act Nutrition Program

Carol O'Shaughnessy  
Domestic Social Policy Division

### Summary

The elderly nutrition program, authorized under Title III of the Older Americans Act, provides grants to state agencies on aging to support congregate and home-delivered meals to persons 60 years and older. The program is designed to address problems of dietary inadequacy and social isolation among older persons. It is the largest Older Americans Act program, funded at \$714.5 million in FY2004, accounting for 40% of the act's funding. The home-delivered nutrition program has grown dramatically in recent years. From 1980 to 2002, the number of home-delivered meals served grew by almost 290%, while the number of congregate meals served actually declined by 18%. The faster growth in home-delivered meals is due to increased growth in federal funding as well as state actions to meet the needs of frail older persons living at home.

The 106<sup>th</sup> Congress approved the Older Americans Act Amendments of 2000 (H.R. 782, P.L. 106-501) extending the act's authorization of appropriations through FY2005. The act is scheduled to be reviewed for reauthorization by the 109<sup>th</sup> Congress.

### Introduction

The elderly nutrition program, authorized under Title III of the Older Americans Act, provides grants to state agencies on aging to support congregate and home-delivered meals to persons 60 years and older. The program is the largest component of the act, accounting for 40% of the act's total FY2004 funding (\$714.5 million out of \$1.798 billion). The program is designed to address problems of dietary inadequacy and social isolation among older persons and evolved from demonstration projects first funded in 1968. In 1972, Congress authorized the program as a separate title of the act and, in 1978, incorporated it into Title III.

**Administration, Funding, and Meals Served.** The Administration on Aging (AoA) in the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) awards funds for congregate nutrition services, home-delivered nutrition services, and nutrition services incentive grants to state agencies on aging. State agencies award nutrition services funds to 655 area agencies on aging that administer the program in their respective planning and service areas. Funds for congregate and home-delivered nutrition services are allotted to

states according to a formula based on each state's relative share of the population aged 60 and over; however, the law stipulates that no state receive less than it received in FY2000, and that all states receive a portion of any increase in appropriations over the FY2000 level. States are required to provide a matching share of 15% in order to receive funds for congregate and home-delivered nutrition programs. Funds for nutrition services incentive grants are allotted to states based on each state's share of total meals served by the nutrition services program in all states the prior year. There is no matching requirement for these funds. Through FY2002, funds for nutrition services incentive grants were awarded to states by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA); in FY2003, Congress transferred the program to AoA.

In FY2004, of the \$714.5 million for the program, \$386.4 million is for congregate nutrition (54%); \$179.9 million for home-delivered nutrition (25%); and \$148.2 million for nutrition services incentive grants (21%) (**Table 1**). Funding for nutrition services represents nearly 58% of FY2004 funding for Title III, which also funds a wide array of social services to older persons, family caregiver support activities, and disease prevention and health promotion services. The home-delivered nutrition program has grown dramatically in recent years. From 1980 to 2004, funding for home-delivered services grew by 260%, while funding for congregate nutrition services increased by about 43%.

**Table 1. Older Americans Act Nutrition Services Funding,  
FY1980 — FY2004**  
(\$ in millions)

Fiscal year	Congregate meals	Home-Delivered meals	Nutrition services incentive grants <sup>a</sup>	Total nutrition services
1980	\$270.0	\$50.0	\$74.2	\$394.2
1985	\$336.0	\$67.9	\$127.0	\$530.9
1990	\$351.9	\$79.0	\$143.5	\$574.4
1995	\$375.8	\$94.1	\$150.0	\$619.9
1996	\$364.5	\$105.3	\$150.0	\$619.9
1997	\$364.5	\$105.3	\$140.0	\$609.9
1998	\$374.4	\$112.0	\$140.0	\$626.4
1999	\$374.3	\$112.0	\$140.0	\$626.3
2000	\$374.3	\$147.0	\$140.0	\$661.3
2001	\$378.4	\$152.0	\$149.7	\$680.1
2002	\$390.0	\$176.5	\$149.7	\$716.2
2003	\$384.6	\$181.0	\$148.7	\$714.3
2004	\$386.4	\$179.9	\$148.2	\$714.5

**Source:** AoA and USDA appropriations legislation.

a. Formerly USDA cash or cash-in-lieu of commodities program.

Although states receive separate allotments for congregate and home-delivered nutrition services, and for supportive services, they are allowed to transfer allotted funds among these three service categories (up to 40% of funds between congregate and home-delivered nutrition services allotments with waivers for higher amounts if approved by the Assistant Secretary for Aging; and up to 30% among supportive services and congregate and home-delivered nutrition services allotments). In recent years, state transfer of funds has resulted in a decrease of funds available for congregate nutrition services. In FY2001, states transferred \$68 million out of their congregate nutrition services allotments to either the home-delivered nutrition or supportive services allotments, resulting in a decrease of 18% in funds that were originally for congregate nutrition services. Funds available for home-delivered meals increased by 25% as a result of funding transfers. State initiatives to respond to the demand for home-based services by frail homebound older persons is an important factor in their decisions to transfer funds.

In FY2002, of the 250 million meals were provided to older persons, 57% were provided to frail older persons at home, and 43% were provided in congregate settings (**Table 2**). From 1980 to 2002, the number of home-delivered meals served grew by 290%, while the number of congregate meals served actually declined by 18%. A number of reasons account for this, including the trend by states to transfer funds from their congregate services allotments to home-delivered services; increased federal funding for home-delivered services; state initiatives to expand home care services for frail older persons living at home; and successful leveraging of non-federal funds for home delivered services.

**Table 2. Older Americans Act Nutrition Services,  
Number of Meals Served, FY1980 — FY2002**

(in millions)

Fiscal year	Congregate meals	Home-delivered meals	Total meals	Home-delivered meals as a percent of total meals
1980	132.0	36.4	168.4	22%
1985	149.9	75.5	225.4	33%
1990	142.4	101.8	244.2	42%
1995	123.4	119.0	242.4	49%
1996	118.6	119.0	237.6	52%
1997	116.5	123.5	240.0	51%
1998	114.0	130.0	244.0	53%
1999	112.8	134.6	247.4	54%
2000	115.9	143.5	259.4	55%
2001	112.1	143.5	255.6	56%
2002	108.3	142.0	250.3	57%

**Source:** Administration on Aging, State Program Reports.

**Eligibility and Service Delivery Requirements.** Persons aged 60 or older and their spouses of any age may participate. The following groups may also receive meals: persons under age 60 with disabilities who reside in housing facilities occupied primarily by the elderly where congregate meals are served; persons with disabilities who reside at home with, and accompany, older persons to meals; and nutrition service volunteers. Services must be targeted at persons with the greatest social and economic need, with particular attention to low income minority older persons and older persons residing in rural areas. Means tests for program participation are prohibited, but older persons are encouraged to contribute towards the costs of meals. They may not be denied services for failure to contribute.

Congregate and home-delivered nutrition services projects are required to offer at least one meal per day, five or more days per week (except in rural areas where less frequency is allowed). Each meal must provide a minimum of one-third of the daily recommended dietary allowances established by the Food and Nutrition Board of the National Academy of Sciences-National Research Council.

Providers must provide meals that comply with state or local laws regarding safe and sanitary handling of food, equipment, and supplies that are used to store, prepare and deliver meals, and must carry out meal programs using the advice of dietitians and meal participants. The law requires projects to provide for nutrition screening of participants, and where appropriate, nutrition education and counseling. Providers are encouraged to make arrangements with schools and other facilities serving meals to children in order to promote intergenerational meals programs.

Congregate meals programs operate in a variety of sites, such as senior centers, community centers, schools, and adult day care centers. Nutrition service providers offer a variety of social services at meal sites, such as nutrition education and screening, shopping assistance, and health promotion activities.

**Program Evaluation.** In June 1996, AoA released findings of a major national evaluation required by the 1992 amendments. The evaluation, *Serving Elders At Risk: The Older Americans Act Nutrition Programs*, reported that the program is an important part of participants' overall nutrition. OAA supported meals consumed by participants are their primary source of daily nutrients. Participants are older and more likely to live alone, to be poor, and to be members of minority groups compared to the total elderly population. They are also more likely to have health and functional limitations that place them at nutritional risk. The evaluation also indicated that for every Title III dollar spent, the program leveraged between \$1.70 (for congregate meals) to \$3.35 (for home-delivered meals) in other funding sources, including state, local and private funds, and participant contributions toward the cost of meals.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Administration on Aging, *Serving Elders at Risk: The Older Americans Act Nutrition Programs — National Evaluation of the Elderly Nutrition Program, 1993-1995*.

**Legislation.** P.L. 106-501 reauthorized the Older Americans Act Amendments through FY2005. The act is scheduled to be reviewed for reauthorization by the 109<sup>th</sup> Congress. Among other things, the 2000 amendments clarified that the Title III formula used for allocation of nutrition services funds to states should be based on the most recent U.S. Census Bureau data on the number of persons 60 and over. It also stipulated that no state receive less than it received in FY2000. In addition, Congress wanted to assure that if there were an increase in appropriations over the FY2000 level, each state would receive a share of the increase; the law required that each state allotment be increased at a rate that is at least *20% of the percentage increase* in the total allotment over the FY2000 amount.

P.L. 106-501 also changed the formula for distribution of nutrition service grant funds. The formula for this program (formerly known as the USDA cash or cash-in-lieu of commodities program) was changed from one that was based on per meal reimbursement rate set by law and updated each year by the Secretary of Agriculture. Funds are now distributed to states based on each state's share of the number of meals served under its nutrition program the prior year. In FY2003, appropriations legislation transferred the program from the USDA to AoA, and stipulated that these funds may not be subject to transfer provisions that apply to Title III supportive services; may not be used for state and area agency administration; and are not subject to the federal matching requirements that apply to the congregate and home-delivered nutrition programs. In addition, as under prior law, states may continue to receive reimbursement in the form of cash (as most states do) or commodities in lieu of cash.