

**AGING IN COMMUNITY COMMITTEE  
OF THE  
COMMISSION ON AGING**

Date: May 11, 2021

9:30am-11:30 am

Meeting Topic “Food Insecurity”

**In Attendance:** Monica Schaeffer (co-chair, AIC), Wayne Berman (co-chair, AIC), Barbara Selter, Nanine Meiklejohn, Marsha Weber, Richard Jourdenais, Miriam Kelty, Eddie Rivas, Joyce Dubow, Karon Phillips, Mary Sweeney, Art Williams, Maritza Rivera

**Staff:** Pazit Aviv, Marcia Pruzan,

**Guests:** Barbara Brubeck (Friends House Retirement Community, Inc), Carol Craig (MC Senior Nutrition Program), Angela Whitmal (MANNA Foods)

**Opening Remarks from the Co-Chairs:** Monica and Wayne welcomed everyone and Wayne reviewed the agenda and focus for the meeting. The focus of the meeting was on “Food Insecurity”. Carol Craig (MC Senior Nutrition Program) and Angela Whitmal (MANNA Foods) were invited to speak about their respective programs and take questions.

**Approval of the Minutes:** The minutes of the April 13<sup>th</sup> meeting were approved and seconded.

**PRESENTATION AND QUESTIONS: Food Insecurity**

**Carol Craig, Director, Senior Nutrition Program, MoCo** described the key features of the program. The main focus of the Senior Nutrition Program is socialization and not food insecurity. The program seeks to provide socialization and nutritious meals to seniors to prevent isolation and support aging-in place objectives.

This focus is derived from the principles embedded in the Older Americans Act that defines need in two ways: greatest social and greatest economic need. “*Greatest economic need*” is the need resulting from an income level at or below the poverty line. However the program doesn’t exclude anyone with a higher income. “*Greatest social need*” means the need caused by non-economic factors, such as: (a) physical and mental disabilities; (b) language barriers; and (c) cultural, social, or geographical isolation, including isolation caused by racial or ethnic status, that restricts the ability of an individual to perform normal daily tasks; or threatens the capacity of the individual to live independently. The following aspects of the program were addressed:

**Eligibility:** Anyone over age 60 (and their spouse of any age) is eligible.

In some circumstances, people under the age of 60 are eligible if they are the spouse of an eligible person; disabled and living in the same home with an eligible person; or disabled and living in a building that has a lunch program operating within.

**Participation rates:** Since March 2020, (when senior centers and congregate housing programs were closed), the Senior Nutrition Program has served more than 739,000 meals to over 2,800 discrete individual seniors.

**Budget:** During the COVID emergency, the Senior Nutrition Program received several rounds of additional federal funding to augment its budget. Ms. Craig stated that the program currently has funding to sustain current services levels through Federal Fiscal Year 2022.

**Staffing:** The Senior Nutrition Program is currently fully staffed and includes a new program manager who is a Registered Dietitian. The COVID emergency and the introduction of mandatory teleworking forced the program to make adaptations that have and will continue to benefit the program. Electronic software, accompanied by new methods of obtaining and reporting information, that was previously paper based, has been introduced. This allows the staff to focus on additional program improvements, such as data integrity.

**Public/Private Partnerships:** Representatives of the Senior Nutrition Program participate in the Food Security Task Force, the Montgomery County Food Council, and the Food Assistance Program. They also oversee the grant contracts for the Takoma Park Food Pantry and the My Groceries to Go program with CAFB; work closely with four Adult Day Centers, two Congregate Housing Services Programs, the Housing Opportunities Commission (HOC), representatives of senior housing, and most of the Meals on Wheels organizations operating in Montgomery County. A partnership with HOC enabled the program to reach additional older adults living in 5 HOC buildings.

**Request for assistance from CoA-** In the past, the COA has indicated that there are seniors in great need in the up-County area, but the program has been unable to identify people they are not already serving. Ms. Craig asked the COA to assist in finding individuals who may be eligible for the program and connecting them to the Senior Nutrition Program.

**Angela Whitmal, Sr. Director of Participant Support, Manna Food Center** offered an overview of the many programs offered under the Manna umbrella. The program was established 38 years ago and operates a food warehouse. They serve almost 51,000 participants and have distributed 3.3 million pounds of food throughout the county at various venues. Manna provides food for families, operates a mobile kitchen and pop-up pantry, runs a farm-to-food bank, has a “choice” pantry, conducts a community food rescue program and assists individuals to apply for SNAP benefits (helped with 410 snap applications), 26 percent of which were for seniors), and advocates for improvements in food programs.

Population served- During FY20, older adult households comprised about 30 percent of those benefiting from Manna’s programs—about 45 percent of whom speak English and 42 percent Spanish. (The data here probably is accurate. My note confirms the 44% but not whether the other percent applies just to seniors or all participants.)

Transportation is an issue. Only about 30 percent drive their own cars while 19 percent rely on friends and family to visit distribution sites. Twenty-four percent have food delivered by Manna or caseworkers (largely because of lack of transportation.)

Manna tries to tailor the food it provides to older adults to address nutrition and dietary preferences of this population. The nutritionist has helped to design meals appropriate—low sodium, high fiber, calcium-rich, etc. Manna also takes in to account food preparation issues that older adults face, such as ability to cut food, stand during meal preparation, dental issues, etc.

The pandemic necessitated changes to the program. Volunteers from the Villages helped with distribution.

Following the two presentations the members of the committee had several questions.

- Does Manna use “Transportation on Demand”- yes
- How are new sites selected – Largely through relationships staff forges with groups
- Describe the relationship with LYFT—this relationship did not work out
- Do they provide culturally-appropriate meals— Yes, at 3 congregate places—Chinese, grab and go, Vietnamese food delivered directly to recipient, Chinese pick up meals. They want to work with CASA to reopen. Also expanding vegetarian and halach meals.
- Have there been changes to the SNAP allotment? Need to ask Pazit Aviv
- Why is SNAP enrollment among older adults so low—level of shame, benefit not large, some places don’t accept SNAP for food that is delivered (especially problematic during covid crisis). Manna working with various programs advocating benefits for SNAP.
- Are there programs in the county like those championed by Jose Andres? The County does work with caterers to serve their clients.

**Thoughts on How the CoA can help support these two important programs:**

Ms. Craig suggested that the CoA could use help to identify people who might be eligible for their programs and generally getting the word out about Senior Nutrition program. This is especially important in the Up-county area where more of the services are needed.

Ms. Whitmal admitted that most don’t know about Manna—The CoA could share info and advocate about the importance of food access. Ms. Whitmal offered to connect the CoA with Manna’s -Food community Rescue Team concerning food waste.

**UPCOMING MEETING:** The next AIC meeting will be held on Tuesday, June 8<sup>th</sup> at 9:30 am. The main meeting topic will be Technology to help improve the Lives of Older Adults in MoCo. It will be facilitated by Wayne Berman. We will be hosting two speakers:

- 1.
- 2.

**MEETING ADJOURNED:** 11:40 am