Older Americans Act: Updated Information on Unmet Need for Services

Briefing for Congressional Staff

Subcommittee on Primary Health and Retirement Security

Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions

United States Senate

Overview

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Introduction: The Older Americans Act

- The Older Americans Act of 1965 (OAA) was enacted, among other things, to help older adults remain in their homes and communities.*
- Programs authorized and funded by OAA Title III grants provide a broad range of assistance to older adults in need of such services, including congregate and home-delivered meals, home-based care, and transportation services.**

* Pub. L. No. 89-73, §§ 79 Stat. 219 (codified as amended at 42 U.S.C. §§ 3021-3030s-2). The act was most recently reauthorized by the Older Americans Act Amendments of 2006, Pub. L. No. 109-365, 120 Stat. 2522.

** 42 U.S.C. §§ 3021-3030s-2. While Title III programs are not entitlements, all people age 60 and older are eligible for services. 42 U.S.C. §§ 3002(40).

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Introduction: An Update to 2011 Report

- In 2011, we analyzed 2008 data and found that about 9 percent of low-income older adults (an estimated 1.6 million out of 17.6 million) received meals like those provided by Title III programs, and that approximately 12 million out of 16 million older adults who likely needed home-based care did not receive it.*
- While funding provided to states for Title III programs has decreased since 2009,** the number of older adults has increased from 55.5 million to 62.9 million in 2013.***
- As Congress considers reauthorization of the OAA, if current trends continue, the number of adults who need services like those provided by OAA Title III grants may increase.

* GAO, *Older Americans Act: More Should Be Done to Measure the Extent of Unmet Need for Services*, GAO-11-237 (Washington, D.C.: Feb. 28, 2011).

** Funding was $1.178 billion in 2009, $1.128 billion in 2013, and $1.156 billion in 2014. The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 appropriated an additional $65 million for congregate meals and $32 million for home-delivered meals under Title III. Pub. L. No. 111-5, 123 Stat. 115, 179.

*** U.S. Census Bureau, 2009 and 2013 American Community Surveys.

Objective

- To update the findings of our 2011 report, we examined:
  - what is known about older Americans' reported need for home and community-based services like those funded by the OAA and the potential unmet need for these services, based on national survey data.

Scope and Methodology

- Our methodology is consistent with the methodology we used for our 2011 report. Specifically:
- To estimate potential need and receipt of meals services like those funded by Title III programs, we analyzed the most recent data from the Current Population Survey's (CPS) Food Security Supplement (2013).
  - We limited our CPS analysis to adults age 60 and older living in households with incomes below 185 percent of the poverty threshold,* and the younger spouses and household members with disabilities, who are also eligible for meals services.**
  - Unlike our 2011 report, we did not analyze social isolation data from CPS.***

* We included this income restriction because these are the only individuals who were asked all questions related to participation in home-delivered and congregate meals.

** 42 U.S.C. § 3030g-21(2)(I). An estimated 25 percent of people age 60 and older are below 185 percent of the poverty line.

*** This was due to changes in how survey respondents were selected to answer relevant social isolation questions since the prior survey.

Scope and Methodology (cont'd)

- To estimate potential need and receipt of home-based care like those funded by Title III programs, we analyzed the most recent data from the Health and Retirement Study (HRS) (2012).
  - We limited our HRS analysis of home-based care to all adults age 60 and older.
- To estimate potential need for transportation services like those funded by Title III programs, we analyzed data from the 2012 HRS.
  - We limited our HRS analysis of transportation services to all adults age 65 and older. *
- We assessed the reliability of the data we used by reviewing relevant documentation and conducting electronic testing. We found the data to be reliable for our purposes.

* Data were not available for all adults age 60 and older.

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Many Low-Income Older Adults Who Likely Need Meals Do Not Receive Them

- We estimate that approximately 10 percent of an estimated 16.6 million low-income older adults receive meals services like those provided by Title III programs, according to our analysis of data from the 2013 CPS.*
- Many more older adults likely need services, but do not receive them (see fig. 1).

* Unless otherwise noted, our estimates of low-income older adults likely to need or receive meals services have a maximum confidence interval of +/- 5 percentage points of the estimate.

Figure 1: Estimated Percentages of Low-Income Older Adults with Likely Need for Meals Services

	Characteristic of likely need	Have each characteristic	Receive home-delivered or congregate meals	Receive neither type of meal
Food security*	Food secure	76.5	7.6	92.4
	Food insecure	23.5	17.4	82.6
Number of difficulties with daily activities**	None	64.4	7.1	92.9
	One	18.7	13.1	86.9
	Two or more	16.9	17.2	82.8

Source: GAO analysis of 2013 Current Population Survey data.
Note: estimates in this table have 95 percent confidence intervals within +/- 3.2 percentage points.
*We used the U.S. Department of Agriculture's measure of food security. Individuals are considered food insecure if they report three or more conditions such as skipping meals because there was not enough money for food.
** We used questions about functional impairments (i.e. difficulty with daily activities) to identify those with potential difficulties preparing or obtaining food. This includes difficulties with instrumental activities of daily living (IADL) such as shopping or housework, activities of daily living (ADL) such as dressing or bathing, and cognitive impairments.

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Food Insecurity Increased, Though Meals Receipt among the Food Insecure Improved Since 2008

- More low-income older adults are food insecure than in 2008 (about 19 percent in 2008 compared to 24 percent in 2013).
  - But the percentage of these individuals who receive meals has also increased by about 50 percent (an estimated 11 percent in 2008 and 17 percent in 2013).
- Some aspects remained the same. For example, the percentage of low-income older adults who have difficulty with two or more daily activities and the percentage of these individuals who receive meals remained similar.

Those More Likely to Be Food Insecure Are Also More Likely to Receive Meals

- Low-income older adults with certain characteristics are more likely both to be food insecure and to receive meals. For example, such characteristics include:
  - Having impairments or difficulties that may make it difficult to obtain or prepare meals
  - Receiving food assistance over the past year.*

* Also known as Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits.

For additional detail, see table 4 in enclosure III.

Funding and Awareness May Help to Explain Why Unmet Need Exists, per 2011 Report

- In 2011 we identified several potential reasons why an older adult may be likely to need meals services but not receive them. For example:
  - Officials from several state agencies stressed that need for home-delivered meals is greater than the level of services they are able to fund.
  - Some state and local agency officials also noted that some older adults do not know about meals services.

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Approximately Two-Thirds of Older Adults Who Have Difficulties with Daily Activities Receive Limited or No Home-Based Care

- An estimated 27 percent (about 16 million) of older adults from all income levels report difficulties with one or more daily activities, indicating they may need home-based care, according to our analysis of 2012 HRS data.*
- Two-thirds or more of these older adults either receive no help, or receive help with some, but not all, of their difficulties—either formally from sources such as Title III programs and Medicaid or informally through family members. Specifically, between approximately 67 and 78 percent do not receive help with all identified difficulties, depending on the number and type of difficulty.

*Unless otherwise noted, our estimates related to likely need and receipt of home-based care and need for transportation services have a maximum confidence interval of +/- 4.1 percentage points of the estimate.

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Some Aspects of Home-Based Care Have Improved Since 2008

- Among those who have difficulty with daily activities such as shopping or housework,* fewer than half of older adults receive home-based care, which is more than in 2008 (an estimated 34 percent in 2008 compared to 44 percent in 2012).
  - About one-third receive help with all identified difficulties, which is more than in 2008 (about 24 percent).
- More older adults receive professional help than did in 2008 among those who have difficulty with three or more basic activities such as bathing or walking (about 19 percent in 2008 compared to an estimated 30 percent in 2012).**

* Known as instrumental activities of daily living (IADL).

** Known as activities of daily living (ADL).

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About One in Five Adults Age 65 and Older Potentially Need Transportation Services

- An estimated 20 percent of people 65 and older (about 8.5 million) are potentially at-risk for needing transportation services like those provided by Title III programs, according to our analysis of 2012 HRS data.*
  - This is similar to the figure we reported in 2011 using 2008 data.
- In our 2011 report, we recommended that the Secretary of Health and Human Services partner with others to develop uniform data collection procedures for obtaining information on older adults with unmet needs. The agency said it would explore options to implement this recommendation, though it has not fully implemented the recommendation to date.

* This includes individuals who (1) are unable to drive, (2) have not driven in the past month, and/or (3) are able to drive, but do not have a car available.

Extent of Unmet Transportation Need Still Unknown

- We previously reported that in 2012, OAA Title III programs funded:
  - 1.2 million "assisted transportation" rides (e.g. an escort) to nearly 32,000 individuals.
  - 24.5 million "transportation" rides (e.g. bus service) to an unknown number of individuals.*
- Data was not collected on the number of individuals receiving non-assisted transportation service through Title III programs.

* GAO, *Transportation for Older Adults: Measuring Results Could Help Determine If Coordination Efforts Improve Mobility, GAO-15-158* (Washington, D.C.: Dec. 10, 2014).