Summit Report

Arkansas Senior Hunger Summit 2014

Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance
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A harsh truth faces Arkansas’s government leaders, senior advocate organizations, volunteers and, most importantly, senior citizens. With more than 240,000 persons aged 60 and older in our state facing food insecurity issues – about 40 percent of that population – Arkansas ranks first among all states for the percentage of senior citizens at risk of hunger.

The situation is grim, but it is not without hope.

As recently as 2009, Arkansas ranked first in food insecurity with another population: children. Thanks to the combined efforts of state government leaders and hunger relief organizations, specifically the No Kid Hungry campaign spearheaded in Arkansas by Gov. Mike Beebe and the Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance, Arkansas now ranks seventh in the country for hunger in that population.

While much work remains to ensure all children enjoy adequate food intake, the progress made in only a few years is affirmative proof that focused, cooperative efforts among public and private entities can make a stark difference for our citizens.

To this end, the Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance designed and implemented the Arkansas Senior Hunger Summit 2014, the first of its kind in our state. More than 200 participants from across Arkansas gathered to learn from hunger relief experts and to share information about the successes and challenges regarding senior hunger experienced in their own communities.

Participants learned that senior hunger often becomes a health issue, as the malnutrition associated with hunger can lead to myriad physical problems such as reduced strength, increased injuries from falls, asthma, diabetes, cardiovascular disease and higher rates of infection.

Important steps to alleviating senior hunger in Arkansas include recognizing the fact of senior hunger as well as the health and social consequences it causes, enrolling more eligible seniors in the federal...
Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program, reaching more seniors through food pantries and food delivery services and advocating for policies needed to support efforts to increase seniors’ access to food.

Coalitions of key stakeholders at the community level combined with coordinating efforts at the state level are needed to successfully lower the rate of senior hunger in Arkansas.

What follows is a summary of the information presented at the Arkansas Senior Hunger Summit 2014. Suggested next steps in the effort to alleviate hunger among seniors are offered as well.

The Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance is committed to eradicating the risk of hunger for all Arkansans. It is our hope that the Arkansas Senior Hunger Summit 2014 and this report of that activity will prove to be a significant step toward this goal. We appreciate Arkansas state Rep. John Edwards for underwriting this report.
Summit Overview

The Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance hosted the first Arkansas Senior Hunger Summit on October 14, 2014, at Heifer International in Little Rock to engage policy-makers, senior and hunger advocates and volunteers from across the state in this heretofore largely unaddressed issue.

The more than 200 attendees represented community- and church-based food pantries, food bank personnel, health care workers, hunger relief advocates, elected officials, candidates and other individuals concerned about the issue of hunger among our state’s senior citizens.

The conference offered a rich slate of speakers for its plenary sessions, including:

- **Kathy Webb**  
  Executive Director, Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance
- **Mike Beebe**  
  Governor, State of Arkansas
- **Kevin Concannon**  
  Under Secretary for Food, Nutrition and Consumer Services, U.S. Department of Agriculture
- **Craig Gundersen**  
  Soybean Industry Endowed Professor of Agricultural Strategy, University of Illinois
- **Enid Borden**  
  Founder/President/CEO, National Foundation to End Senior Hunger
- **Krista Hughes**  
  Director, Arkansas Department of Human Services Division of Adult and Aging Services
In addition, the summit offered attendees the opportunity to participate in two of the following six small group sessions:

- Effective Advocacy
- SNAP Outreach to Seniors
- Foodbank Strategies for Helping Seniors
- Identifying Malnutrition and Nutritional Needs in Seniors
- Connecting with Your Community
- Senior Meal Programs: Maximizing Resources to End Hunger Tomorrow

**FOOD INSECURITY DEFINED**

Many different levels of food insecurity exist among seniors. The U.S. Department of Agriculture provides these definitions to distinguish among those levels:

**Marginal Food Security:** Sometimes called marginal food insecurity, persons in this category face anxiety over how to pay for enough food, and they are uncertain about where and how they will buy food. They often experience high levels of stress that adversely affect health and quality of life.

**Low Food Security:** People in this category have enough food but are unable to buy more expensive, nutritious foods such as fresh meats, fruits and vegetables. They therefore have less-nutritious diets that can lead to numerous health problems.

**Very Low Food Security:** Individuals in this category experience interrupted eating patterns, may eat less than they would otherwise and may be restricted to meals that are not socially acceptable. They may use food pantries or public assistance, or, especially for seniors, may depend on help for food from family members. They may experience true hunger, and about a third report going one or more days with no food at all.¹

¹ *Senior Hunger in Arkansas 2014, Impact, Extent, and Trends.* Division of Aging and Adult Services, Arkansas Department of Human Services.
The State of Senior Hunger in Arkansas

Kathy Webb, Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance
Gov. Mike Beebe, State of Arkansas

The first step in solving the problem of hunger among seniors in Arkansas is to acknowledge that it exists.

The fact that Arkansas ranks first in the country for the rate of food insecurity among seniors – approximately 240,000, or 40 percent, of Arkansans aged 60 and older are at risk of hunger – galvanized the Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance’s commitment to tackle this issue.

Alliance executive director Kathy Webb said Arkansas Hunger Summit 2014 marks the first big push in creating a cohesive, collaborative statewide effort to end hunger among seniors.

This first step is an important one in raising awareness about and finding solutions to the “heart-breaking” problem of senior hunger in Arkansas, said Governor Mike Beebe.

FACTS AT A GLANCE

- About 40 percent of Arkansans aged 60 and older live with food insecurity. No other state faces a higher rate of food insecurity among its seniors.
- Senior food insecurity causes are primarily financial hardship, lack of transportation, low access to grocery stores and limited physical mobility.
- Negative health conditions related to senior food insecurity include malnutrition, poor overall health, extended hospital stays and cardiovascular disease.
- Arkansas seniors underutilize Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits.²

Pointing to Arkansas’ success in diminishing childhood hunger in recent years, Governor Beebe predicted that the same kind of impact could be made on senior hunger.

In 2009, Arkansas ranked first among states for children who were at risk of hunger. Within four years that ranking dropped to seventh, and additional progress is expected when the next national report is released.

“We can have that same kind of impact on senior hunger,” Governor Beebe said.

“It just takes our collective willingness and leadership to craft strategies and gather those individuals and organizations positioned to effect change.”

“*If a state forgets those who sacrificed for our generation and other upcoming generations, then shame on us.*”

– Arkansas Gov. Mike Beebe
National Response to Senior Hunger

Kevin Concannon, U.S. Department of Agriculture

As the leadership in Arkansas has already proven its commitment to solving hunger among its people, the state is poised to make a substantial difference in addressing senior hunger, U.S. Department of Agriculture Under Secretary Kevin Concannon said.

While Arkansas ranks first in the nation for senior hunger, in one facet – the percent of eligible seniors participating in the federal Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP) – it mirrors the national average. Only about 42 percent of eligible seniors in the United States, as well as in Arkansas, participate in the food assistance program. In the population at large, about 83 percent of eligible individuals are enrolled in the SNAP program.

Seniors, Concannon said, are not always aware that they qualify for SNAP benefits. This is especially true for seniors receiving Social Security or other government benefits as they may believe that precludes them from receiving other forms of government assistance.

Therefore, educating seniors so they have the facts they need to make informed decisions about applying for SNAP benefits is critically important. “Let seniors make that decision,” Concannon said, “but they need to be able to make an informed decision.”

Another reason seniors tend to be underrepresented in SNAP is that they fear their participation will displace a person whom they perceive as needing the benefit more, such as a hungry child. “This will not happen,” Concannon said. “They need to know that.”

In addition, many seniors find the SNAP application process daunting. Not knowing whom to call, how to access the form electronically or concern about agreeing to a one-on-one interview can all pose barriers to the process for some seniors. Concannon urged participants to look for and utilize ways to make the application process easier for seniors.

“Arkansas is a state that is genuinely trying to make a difference in addressing hunger.”

– Kevin Concannon, U.S. Department of Agriculture
SNAP, Concannon said, is the most significant federal program to employ in addressing senior hunger, but others also can be effective in this effort:

- Emergency Food and Assistance Program, which works with food pantries in the state
- Commodities Food Service Program, which serves about 3,000 seniors in the state by providing them with a box of food each month
- Farmers markets, by enabling the ability to process SNAP cards

Concannon urged forming partnerships among entities that could educate seniors about SNAP and other means of accessing nutritional foods and that could increase food access for seniors by engaging retailers, faith-based groups, advocacy organizations, health care providers and community- and state-level policymakers.

WHY SENIORS DON’T APPLY FOR SNAP

Senior citizens are far less likely than the population at large to apply for help through the Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program. Reasons attributed to the underrepresentation of seniors in the program include:

- Seniors often are **unaware they are eligible** for SNAP benefits. This is especially true for seniors receiving Social Security or other government subsidies as they may believe that disqualifies them from receiving other forms of government assistance.
- Seniors **fear** that if they accept SNAP benefits, they may be keeping another who needs SNAP assistance more from receiving it.
- Seniors are **reluctant** to share confidential information.
- Some seniors do not know **how to apply** for SNAP benefits.
How to End Senior Hunger

Craig Gundersen, University of Illinois

Food security increases with the economic health of the nation. For instance, during the relatively good economic times of 2000 to 2007, 10 percent of seniors faced the threat of hunger.

When the economic downturn occurred the following year, the number of seniors facing food insecurity increased dramatically, Craig Gundersen of the University of Illinois said. For instance, in 2001, 5 million U.S. seniors faced the threat of hunger. In 2009, 9 million did.

While food security is related to the economic health of the nation, it is a misconception that food insecurity is related to poverty. Gundersen reported that almost 70 percent of people with marginal food security, meaning they experience anxiety over how to pay for food, have incomes that put them above the poverty line.

Among senior citizens, the younger set who fall between the ages of 60 and 69 experience higher rates of food insecurity. Food insecurity is also more likely for seniors who live at or below the poverty line, who have less than a 12th-grade education, who are African-American or Hispanic, who are divorced or separated, and who have grandchildren living with them.

Seniors who do not enjoy enough or the right kind of food to sustain good nutrition are more likely to suffer from such negative health consequences as asthma, chest pain, heart attack and congestive heart failure.

One in four Arkansas seniors faced the threat of hunger in 2012. Of the 10 states with the largest percentages of seniors facing food insecurity, nine are in the South:

1. Arkansas
2. Louisiana
3. Mississippi
4. Tennessee
5. North Carolina
6. Texas
7. South Carolina
8. Alabama
9. Nevada
10. Georgia
But, Gundersen said, a number of actions can be taken to alleviate the problem of senior hunger:

- Encourage seniors to **participate in SNAP** because many who are eligible do not participate.
- Work to **end restrictions** to SNAP purchases as seniors in particular find it demeaning to be told how they can spend money.
- **Address barriers** for grandparents raising grandchildren
- Encourage the **presence of grocery stores** in low income areas.
- **Do not tax** food items.
- **Reach out** to socially isolated seniors.
- Assist persons with **mobility issues**.
- Recognize the **importance of informal food-assistance** programs.
Meeting the Challenge

Enid Borden, National Foundation to End Senior Hunger

“The government calls them the food insecure,” Enid Borden of the National Foundation to End Senior Hunger, told Arkansas Senior Hunger Summit 2014 participants. “I call them America’s forgotten.”

Seniors, she added, are the most hidden of America’s citizens facing the risk of hunger.

Eradicating hunger among seniors, and all populations, requires approaching the problem from a macro-level, she said. Food programs such as Meals-on-Wheels are effective at stopping hungry, but not hunger.

Borden pointed to the growing number of food banks in the United States, the increased enrollment in SNAP and other food programs, and the higher numbers of children receiving free and reduced-price meals at schools as proof that “we are merely managing hunger.”

Better funding for the above programs will help them keep more people from being hungry, she said, but the overall problem of hunger demands solutions formed from a broader context.

The National Foundation to End Senior Hunger, the organization Borden founded and leads, advocates reducing food waste to ensure more food is accessible where it is needed.

FAST FACTS

“We have enough food in this world to feed every man, woman and child – instead we’re throwing it away,” Enid Borden of the National Foundation to End Senior Hunger told Arkansas Senior Hunger Summit 2014 participants. Borden offered these facts to support her statement:

● 40 percent of food is never eaten.
● 20 percent of all fish caught are thrown out.
● The average family spends $2,000 on food they don’t eat.
For example, the organization is working with food pantries in Washington, D.C., to calculate the amount of food wasted. These calculations form the basis of strategies to reduce the amount of waste produced. What waste cannot be eliminated is sent to be composted. The compost then is used in gardens that supply food to the pantries.

This is “one solution” in the D.C. area that shows promise, Borden said, adding, “We would love to work with Arkansas.”
Small Group Sessions

Effective Advocacy

*Dana Wills*, Government Affairs Consultant, Wills Law Firm, PLLC
*Lou Tobian*, Director for Outreach and Education, AARP Arkansas

Having the right message and building an effective grassroots advocacy coalition are important components in effective lobbying at the state or community levels, participants in this session learned.

Lou Tobian with AARP Arkansas said *creating the right message or messages should be the first step* in any advocacy campaign.

Ideally, these will be scientifically tested for their appeal and effectiveness through a formal phone survey and focus group process.

If money is not available for that, then messages should be tested informally with a wide variety of persons as thoroughly as possible.

Once messages are created, these messages can be used to recruit volunteers for the advocacy campaign. When recruiting, he said, individuals should not be asked to volunteer, but to do a specific job. They should also be told how that job helps fulfill the larger goal of the campaign.

Message discipline – or, in other words, staying on message – is important for all who plan to deliver the campaign message, whether to legislators and other policymakers, to the media or to individuals through formal and informal speaking opportunities.
As advocates for solutions to senior hunger problems in Arkansas will likely need to work with their state government representatives, Dana Wills of Wills Law Firm shared some tips for lobbying at this level:

- Be focused. Know what your ask is and stick to that.
- When possible, advocate with legislators for whom you vote or can vote.
- Be passionate as well as knowledgeable about the problem of senior hunger in Arkansas.
- Know as much as you can about the legislator you plan to lobby – his or her political party, interests and legislation already sponsored, if he or she is well-liked and respected by other legislators, and if there is any personal connection he or she has with the problem of senior hunger.
- Build relationships with your representatives prior to your ask.
- Know as much as you can about the problem of senior hunger to be able to answer questions (though do not bombard the legislator with information at the time of the ask).
- Have a one-pager about senior hunger to leave with the legislator after making the ask.
- Do not make your ask on a day when the legislature is deep in debate on another issue.
- Don’t talk about a bill by referring to its number; instead, use the name or topic when speaking to a legislator about it.
- Be friendly and personable. Do not threaten, take a negative tone or lose your temper.
- Do not ever refer to what you have donated to the legislator.
- Never lie to the legislator.

“Ideally, lobbyists serve as the voice boxes for larger forces.”
– Dana Wills, Wills Law Firm
SNAP Outreach to Seniors

Lindsey Barnett, Business Process Analyst III, Northrup Grumman
Michele Rodgers, Arkansas Department of Human Services
Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance Outreach Team
Victoria Williams, AARP

The Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program, or SNAP, is one of the most helpful food assistance programs for seniors, and it is also one of the most efficient of all federal programs, Lindsey Barnett with Northrup Grumman told participants of this session.

Not only do 96.4 percent of SNAP benefits reach the right people in the right amount, for every $1 delivered in SNAP benefits, $1.78 is produced for the local economy.

The biggest challenge is getting more seniors enrolled in the SNAP program. Right now, fewer than half of eligible seniors in Arkansas are participating in the program. Many don’t know they are eligible for the program and need education regarding that.

For example, seniors who own their own home or receive Social Security payments may still be eligible for SNAP. Seniors with grandchildren in their home may reach the income threshold for SNAP without realizing it. Also, persons whose medical expenses are covered may have enough in mileage expenses associated with medical care to meet the SNAP income threshold.

A related challenge to enrolling seniors is that the minimum SNAP payment is $16 per month (though it fluctuates with inflation) which may not seem worth the effort of applying. Barnett said the average Arkansas senior who lives alone actually receives $53 a month, and the average Arkansas senior living in a household with others receives $123 a month.

Members of the Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance team shared some ways they encourage seniors that even $16 a month is a help:

- With $16, they can **buy fresh fruits and vegetables** that often aren’t included with food pantry meals.
- The monthly payments can be **saved for desired larger purchases**, such as a Thanksgiving turkey.
- The $16 can be used to **buy a supply of nutrient-rich Ensure** each month.
One of the best ways to reach seniors, according to the Alliance’s SNAP Outreach Team, is to meet with them at pantries where one-on-one assistance can be given, trust formed and relationships built.

**Utilizing senior centers** is another possibility, though these centers tend to foster more of a social atmosphere, so seniors may be less willing to be seen asking about SNAP assistance.

Michele Rodgers of the Arkansas Department of Health said the department now has eight computer-equipped SNAP Mobiles that travel to communities to sign up people for SNAP and other benefits. These, too, have found large success with seniors at food pantries.

In addition to meeting seniors at locales where they normally congregate and dispelling the myths that surround their eligibility for SNAP, leaders of this session agreed that building a sense of trust with seniors was integral to being able to help them sign up for the benefits.

Individuals interested in doing SNAP outreach in their own community were encouraged to contact the Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance or AARP for training.

“**You do not have to get to a SNAP office to apply. You can apply online, by mail or by fax.”**
– Lindsey Barnett, Northrup Grumman.
Foodbank Strategies for Helping Seniors

Shamim Okolloh, Arkansas Foodbank
Glen Shuffield, Hope Outreach Food Pantry
Jeff Quick, Food Bank of North Central Arkansas

Food banks serve all populations facing hunger, but participants in this session learned of strategies food banks have begun employing in their quest to better reach seniors.

Shamim Okolloh said the Arkansas Foodbank has drastically increased the number of seniors it serves in its 33-county area – from about 5,000 in 2010 to about 12,000 this year. Yet, statistics say another 60,000 seniors in those counties are facing hunger. To better reach those people, and with help from a grant from Walmart, the Arkansas Foodbank has implemented a two-stage program to increase seniors’ access to food pantries.

The first phase identified best practices for reaching seniors, and established 12 pilot programs to implement as many of the following five strategies as possible:

- **Outreach** to ensure that seniors know food is accessible in their communities. Forms of outreach include newsletters, stories in the media, social media and posters in churches, post offices senior centers and other places seniors frequent.
- Improving the **pantry experience** for seniors by employing such steps as designating specific hours, counters and waiting areas for them, and having volunteers carry food boxes for them.
- Assisting seniors with the **Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program** (SNAP) by providing them with increased awareness and education about the benefit and by helping them apply to the program.
- Serving **foods that seniors like**, can eat and can prepare easily, and that are healthy for them.
- Implementing **delivery systems**, which are important because so many seniors live in isolated, rural areas without a means to reach a food pantry.

Phase Two, Okolloh said, will involve the creation of model sites that incorporate all best practices learned from the pilot sites. The model sites will also serve as training facilities. A training manual and nutrition classes will also be offered.
The Hope Outreach Pantry in Bismarck, Ark., is a faith-based food pantry serving 250 families facing hunger. Founder Glen Shuffield is a former postman in the area, so he knew quickly that many seniors lived in the area who were not making use of the food pantry.

He realized that because of their often-isolated living conditions, combined with a stigma attached to taking handouts, reaching seniors would be a one-at-a-time effort. “You have to show them you care,” Shuffield said.

Other strategies the Hope Outreach Food Pantry has employed that proved attractive to seniors include stocking a separate supply of senior-friendly foods such as pudding, peanut butter, coffee and tea, and allowing clients to select the foods they want off of the pantry’s shelves rather than giving them pre-packed boxes of food.

Jeff Quick of the Food Bank of North Central Arkansas suggests communities wanting to address senior hunger employ the RACE strategy that he uses for his food bank. RACE stands for:

- Recognition of the problem.
- Assessment of both needs and resources in the community.
- Collaboration with key stakeholders on the issue. He recommends including representatives from hunger relief organizations, community leaders, business leaders, potential funders, faith-based leaders and other leaders from nonprofits performing similar work. Within these categories, he suggests targeting people who have specific knowledge about seniors and how to reach them, such as emergency service personnel who may be the only ones to come into contact with some seniors.
- Elimination of senior hunger. “We’re not there, but we have a strategic plan that is getting us there,” Quick said.
Identifying Malnutrition and Nutritional Needs in Seniors

Janet Rooker, MNSC, RPN, Clinical Associate Professor, UAMS College of Nursing
Amanda Wells Dawson, MS, RD, LD, Research Dietitian, Center for Translational Research in Aging and Longevity, UAMS

Changes that occur with aging can affect seniors’ nutritional needs as well as their nutritional intake, participants of this session learned. What’s more, when compounded with other issues regarding access to nutritional foods that come into play for many seniors, keeping seniors well-nourished and healthy presents a significant challenge.

In general, **seniors have slightly lower energy needs** than younger individuals, though needs vary according to activity level and other physical characteristics.

Senior women, on average, require between 1,600 and 2,200 calories per day. Senior men, again on average, require between 2,000 and 2,800 calories per day.

Malnutrition is not a one-meal or one-day event but occurs when nutrient intake is consistently insufficient to meet nutritional requirements, according to dietitian Amanda Wells Dawson of the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences.

The following six characteristics can be caused by malnutrition. When a person exhibits two or more of these, he or she is considered to be malnourished:

- Insufficient energy (food) intake
- Weight loss
- Loss of muscle mass (exhibited by protruding shoulder blades, collar bones, etc.)
- Loss of body fat
- Fluid accumulation (which could mask weight loss)
- Loss of grip strength

**Malnourishment** in seniors, Dawson said, can **compromise the immune system** and cause muscles and bones to **become weaker**. This can lead to increased rates of infection or more severe injuries from falls, which in turn lead to increased and longer hospital stays, higher healthcare costs and increased fatalities.

“Appetite [in seniors] can change for a number of reasons.”
– Amanda Wells Dawson, University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences
The underlying causes of malnourishment in seniors can result from:

- **An acute disease or injury** that could drastically increase the need for nutrients.
- Some diseases’ diminishment of the body’s ability to **use nutrients**.
- **Loneliness or depression**, which can lead to lack of nutrient intake.
- Physical **changes that occur with aging**, which can lead to lower intake of nutrients, such as a loss of the hormones that trigger hunger, changes in stomach acidity that affect digestion, the loss of taste or smell, and dental issues that affect the ability to chew.
- Lack of **access to food** – which can include the inability to pay for food, little or no access to transportation to grocery stores and physical ability to shop or prepare food – can lead to malnutrition.

Seniors should consume a balanced diet, represented by healthy proteins, fruits, vegetables and whole grains, with limited amounts of unsaturated fats. Sodium and sugar should be avoided as much as possible. Calcium and Vitamin D are important for seniors’ bone health, and can be found in dairy foods, leafy green vegetables, canned fish and eggs.
Detecting malnutrition in seniors can be tricky, Jan Rooker, of the UAMS College of Nursing, said, because many who are on limited incomes may be **filling up with unhealthy foods**. They may be of normal weight or even overweight, but their diet is not delivering the nutrients needed to keep them healthy.

In addition, she said, **access to food may seem possible but is often a challenge**. For instance, seniors who live in assisted-living high-rises or other group residential settings may be in situations in which hunger relief agencies deliver congregant meals that must be eaten in a social setting, but a large percentage of elderly adults will not leave their rooms or apartments to join in the meals.

Transportation from these assisted-living group residences also tends to take seniors to the grocery store, but often they do not stop by food pantries or farmers markets.

And for seniors depending on services like Meals-on-Wheels, the nutrition that is delivered is not consistent. In urban areas, seniors are likely to receive hot meals five days a week while in more rural areas they often receive one delivery a week consisting of a hot meal for that day and four frozen dinners for the rest of the week.

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**HOW MUCH IS TOO MUCH?**

When an individual, particularly a senior, loses weight without trying to, malnourishment could be the culprit. Dietitians use the following guide to assess when persons are losing too much weight:

- **2 percent or greater loss** of body weight in a week
- **5 percent or greater loss** of body weight in a month
- **7.5 percent or greater loss** of body weight in a month in 3 months
- **10 percent or greater loss** of body weight in a month in 6 months
Connecting with Your Community

*Andrea Ridgway, MS, RD. LD, CDE, Arkansas Department of Health*

Community coalitions can play a big role in helping solve the issue of senior hunger, Andrea (Andi) Ridgway of the Arkansas Department of Health told participants in this session.

As evidence, she described the work of two health-related organizations that often operate through community coalitions: the Department of Health’s Hometown Health Improvement Initiative and the Arkansas Coalition for Obesity Prevention (ArCOP).

The **Hometown Health Initiative**, operating for 13 years, has 86 coalitions at work throughout the state, with at least one in each of Arkansas’s 75 counties. While the coalitions focus on varying health priorities, they work with communities to increase active living and healthy eating, or access to nutritious food.

**ArCOP** operates at the state level as well as at the local level. While the ultimate goal is to reduce obesity, Ridgway explained that obesity and hunger are often interrelated, with poverty often being the underlying factor.

“We often see hunger and obesity in the same families ... both can be a result of low income.”

– Andrea Ridgway, UAMS
ArCOP, which has been in existence for five years, works to increase access to healthy and affordable foods. “There’s a big difference when looking at equal access to affordable foods,” Ridgway said. Poorer neighborhoods and communities have less access to healthy foods than do middle and upper class communities as there are often fewer grocery stores or farmers markets located in those areas.

ArCOP awards Growing Healthy Communities grants ranging from a few hundred to several thousand dollars, largely for teams who are promoting health in their own hometowns. Two major initiatives that the grant supports are Cooking Matters and Cooking Matters at the Store classes.

In Cooking Matters, individuals learn to cook inexpensive yet healthy and tasty meals, often using fresh ingredients. In Cooking Matters at the Store, students learn to read labels to select the most nutritious ingredients while remaining on a budget. “It’s helping people learn how to access and how to cook healthy foods,” Ridgway said, adding that often participants are “people who’d never done it before.”

The organization has done a lot of work with schools to increase the farm-to-school program as well as community gardens, which often donate fresh produce to senior centers or other community organizations that can use it.
Senior Meal Programs: Maximizing Resources to End Hunger Tomorrow

**Matt Levine**, Chief Operating Officer, National Foundation to End Senior Hunger  
**Jerry Mitchell**, Area Agency on Aging of Northwest Arkansas

Senior meal programs must approach their operations the way a for-profit business would, participants of this session were told. That means having a business plan that focuses on staying in the black while delivering quality service to clientele.

Jerry Mitchell of Area Agency on Aging of Northwest Arkansas not only contended that that is not the case at many senior food programs – he said that the models most programs are operating under currently are not sustainable. “The senior population is growing. Funding is static. Operating costs are going up,” he said. In the meantime, the number of senior meals served has decreased by 11 percent since 2008.

To improve the situation, Mitchell is instituting the following steps in his organization:

- Negotiating with grocery stores to secure a single food supplier at the lowest cost.
- Monitoring and changing food orders to ensure what is being ordered matches what is being eaten.
- Increasing support from the community – letting the community know what it is gaining economically as well as socially by the food program’s presence.
- Training staff to efficiently order and appetizingly prepare food.
- Training staff in customer-service skills.
- Enhancing the physical setting of the program (painting, cleaning, etc.).
- Marketing more, and more effectively.
- Applying for more grants.
- Selling catering services to other groups and organizations.

“If you look at senior meal programs, our costs are going up, our clients are going up, funding is going down, and I would say our service is going down in most cases.”

– Jerry Mitchell, Area Agency on Aging of Northwest Arkansas
Matt Levine of the National Foundation to End Senior Hunger described “What a Waste,” a specific effort to eliminate waste at senior centers in Washington, D.C.

Every kitchen produces two kinds of waste: line waste, which occurs during food preparation, and plate waste, which is food that is served but not consumed.

Line waste, when made more efficient, allows food to be “rescued” and then consumed. Plate waste, on the other hand, can’t be rescued, but it can become a guide for future menus, Levine said. For instance, the senior centers involved in the What a Waste program have been serving milk every day but seniors do not drink it, often because they are lactose intolerant. So while it is important to deliver calcium, other foods may prove a more efficient means of doing so.

Not all waste can be eliminated, so what waste there is, is collected and sent to a compost farmer. In the spring, the compost is delivered to the senior centers to enrich new raised garden beds, where fresh fruit and vegetables are grown to be used in the centers’ meals. “It’s just closing the loop,” Levine said, “sort of a win-win-win.”

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HUNGER AND FOOD WASTE

- 25% of all water consumed in the U.S. is used on crops we don’t eat.
- 40-50% of all food produced in the U.S. ends up in a landfill.
- 46 million Americans suffer from food insecurity. More than 9 million are seniors.⁴

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The Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance intends for the Senior Hunger Summit 2014 to be a starting point for forming a cohesive effort to eradicate senior hunger in Arkansas.

“Big ideas” from each small group session have been collected and organized into suggested actions that local coalitions or organizations can incorporate into their efforts to fight hunger among seniors. (See Appendix 1.)

Yet, the Alliance and its like-minded partners realize that the Summit must be followed with a concerted effort to marshal the state’s myriad programs to combat hunger among seniors into a streamlined, organized endeavor.

To do so will require strategic planning by significant stakeholders that results in the ability to fund a senior hunger relief director, adequate funding for the program itself and a timeline of action steps.

To that end, the Alliance plans to:

- In early 2015, convene a meeting of key senior hunger relief stakeholders from the realms of non-profits, businesses and government agencies, as well as a senior citizen who has faced hunger, to set overall goals and to identify a subset of this group to form a Senior Hunger Relief Task Force.
• Also in early 2015, hold eight facilitated Senior Hunger Relief Task Force meetings over a two- to three-month period to:
  o Create a strategic plan for addressing senior hunger relief goals complete with detailed action steps and timeline.
  o Research successful senior hunger relief efforts in other states.
  o Create a job description for and hire a senior hunger relief director (to be housed at the Alliance, depending on funding opportunities).
  o Identify appropriate funding opportunities and work individually or in partnership to pursue those funds.
• In 2015, hire a senior hunger relief director. Qualifications and responsibilities for this position will be determined by the Senior Hunger Relief Task Force, but it is recommended that they include the following activities and responsibilities:
  o Coordination of senior hunger relief activities in Arkansas.
  o Establishing strong relationships with legislators and other policymakers at the state level.
  o Maintaining awareness of successful senior hunger relief awareness efforts in other states.
  o Identifying additional senior hunger relief focused resources.
  o Providing a common voice to advocate for senior hunger relief efforts.
  o Implementation of a senior hunger relief publicity/awareness campaign.

Successful completion of these steps should produce tangible wins in the fight against senior hunger in Arkansas. By working together, hunger among seniors can be eliminated. We believe that Arkansas Senior Hunger Summit 2014 has been an important and energizing first step toward reaching that goal.
Appendices

Appendix 1: Big Ideas

The following “big ideas” for relieving hunger among seniors were gleaned from each of the Summit’s small group sessions and are organized into actions that can be enacted at the community level.

**COALITION FORMING**

- Identify and understand the extent and context of senior hunger in your community.
- Identify resources and how to engage them.
- Identify barriers and how to overcome them.
- Identify and work with key stakeholders including community and business leaders, senior advocates, health care workers, hunger relief organizations, others who work with seniors.
- Create a strategic plan – define short-term and long-term goals and specific steps to reach each one.

**SNAP OUTREACH**

- Contact AARP or the Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance to train individuals in your community to perform SNAP outreach.
- Identify places where seniors gather and will be receptive to information about SNAP.
- Form relationships and develop trust with seniors who may be wary of participating in SNAP.
- Educate seniors who do not know they are eligible for SNAP so they can make informed decisions about their participation in SNAP.
- Assist seniors through the SNAP application process or know how to find someone to assist them.
- Encourage the presence of grocery stores with fresh produce in low-income or rural areas.
- Encourage local farmers’ markets to accept payment with SNAP cards.

**INCREASING ACCESS TO SENIOR MEAL PROGRAMS**

- Create community-wide support for senior meal programs and senior centers by raising awareness of their economic as well as social value to communities.
- Make food pantries more senior-friendly by offering foods that seniors like and can easily eat and prepare.
- Make food pantries more inviting to seniors by offering special hours, stations or waiting areas for seniors.
- Help food pantries develop a delivery strategy for seniors unable to reach pantries -- perhaps through volunteers to deliver boxes of food or through senior “buddies” who will drive a fellow senior to the pantry or pick up and deliver his food to him.
- Work with food pantries and senior citizens to be more service oriented.
- Connect with the Arkansas Gleaning Project to work with local farmers who could provide excess produce to food pantries and senior citizens.
- Work with senior centers and other providers of meals to seniors to reduce waste.
- Work with senior centers and other providers of meals to seniors to compost waste.
- Work with senior centers and senior residential organizations to grow fresh fruits and vegetables.
ADVOCACY

- Develop a specific ask for policy makers for law(s) to further the goal of eradicating senior hunger.
- Develop three or four main messages around that ask and stick to them.
- Build relationships with legislators.
- Understand legislators’ politics, issues, reputation and personality and cater your information to that.
- Develop a one-pager of information supporting the rationale for your ask to leave with him or her.
- Express genuine passion about the need to eradicate senior hunger.
- Be pleasant, respectful and always honest with legislators.

EDUCATION AND AWARENESS

- Develop core messages and a plan for communicating about each specific issue – seniors enrolling in SNAP, the public contributing to the food pantry, etc.
- Practice message discipline – stick to your message whether you are speaking with the media, with politicians, with community leaders or with the general public.
- Find means of delivering messages effectively to your intended audience.
Appendix 2: Resources

This extensive list of resources was supplied to Summit participants by Andrea Ridgway, MS, RD, LD, CDE, Arkansas Department of Health.

ARKANSAS COUNTY
Pattillo Center School, Inc. in DeWitt received an ArCOP grant for Healthy Kids Community Garden.

CALHOUN COUNTY
UCRC Coalition has received ArCOP Growing Healthy Communities funding for Cooking Matters and Store Tour Programs.

United Community Resource Council Food (UCRC) Pantry
648 Sturgis Street, Hampton, AR 71744
(870) 818-6153
The pantry is opened on the third Thursday of each month and provides food for 70 to 80 households and more than 100 individuals.

Central Arkansas Development Council
Commodity Distribution, 210 South Lee Street, Hampton, AR 71744

CHICOT COUNTY
City of Lake Village received an ArCOP grant for Healing Hearts: Community Garden Expansion

CLARK COUNTY
Becoming a Healthy Clark County Coalition received a grant from ArCOP, on behalf of Clark County Health Department in Arkadelphia, for Cooking Matters at the Store.

CLEBURNE COUNTY
A community garden plot is manned by members of area churches. The food is donated to the local food pantry.

CLEVELAND COUNTY
Rison Shine Downtown Development Group received an ArCOP grant for Rison Community “Teaching” Garden.

CRAIGHEAD COUNTY
Northeast Arkansas has a food pantry in Jonesboro offering classes such as nutrition, cooking healthy on a budget and more. First Baptist Church has a soup kitchen open Monday through Friday from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. There is also a food pantry as well as a clothes closet.

DALLAS COUNTY
DASH Coalition has received ArCOP Growing Healthy Communities funding for Community Gardens, Cooking Matters and a Farmers Market. The Community Garden is located near a nursing home where
residents pick from the garden and come together with kids from the Early Childhood Center for a Harvest Festival in October.

**Fordyce Senior Citizens Center**
501 West Second Street, Fordyce, AR 71742
(870) 352-3214

**Central Arkansas Development Council**
Commodity Distribution, 410 South East Fourth Street, Fordyce, AR 71742 (870) 352-8894

**GARLAND COUNTY**
The City of Hot Springs received an ArCOP grant for Growing Healthful Eating in Hot Springs & Growing Our Gardens

**GREENE COUNTY**
The Griffin Memorial United Methodist Church has a Food Pantry that participants are allowed to go to once per month. This is for anyone who needs it in that area. They also provide a free lunch every Tuesday. There are an estimated 300 or more per month who take advantage of this. These participants also get educational material and a 15- to 20-minute session on nutrition.

**HEMPSTEAD COUNTY**
City of Hope Arkansas, on behalf of the Department of Community Corrections, received an ArCOP grant for Hope Farmers’ Market.

**HOT SPRING COUNTY**
Healthy Hot Spring County Coalition member from the Hunger Coalition, Faye Williams
fwilliams@malvernleopards.org

**HOWARD COUNTY**
Community garden and Farmer’s Market provide extra produce through local soup kitchen.

New Addition Neighborhood Development Corp.(NANDC) in Nashville received an ArCOP grant for NANDC: Each One Teach One Project Phase I & II.

**INDEPENDENCE COUNTY**
Southside School in Batesville received a grant and provides a free dinner every weekday night from 4:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. This is open to the whole community regardless of income. The school also has a food pantry that is open two days a week.

**JEFFERSON COUNTY**
Arkansas River Education Service Cooperative in Pine Bluff received an ArCOP grant for Cooking Matters at the Store.
LOGAN COUNTY
Magazine United Methodist Church and Magazine School District received an ArCOP grant for Community Garden "Use Your Melon in 2014".

LONoke COUNTY
A church in Ward provides a free meal to anyone on Tuesday night.

MADISON COUNTY
An ArCOP grant funds community gardens at the Madison County Senior Activity and Wellness Center. Several local businessmen assisted with the construction.

MARION COUNTY
Flippin School District received an ArCOP grant for Flippin Community Schools Garden Project.

Marion County Home Town Health, on behalf of Yellville-Summit School District in Yellville, received an ArCOP grant for It’s a SNAP! & Panther Produce Market.

NEVADA COUNTY
Prescott-Nevada County Chamber of Commerce received an ArCOP grant for Prescott Farmers' Market.

OUACHITA COUNTY
AHOC Coalition has received ArCOP Growing Healthy Communities funding for Community Gardens and Cooking Matters education.

*Fairview United Methodist Church - Good Samaritan Food Pantry*
2603 Mt. Holly Road, Camden, AR 71701
(870) 231-4383
Documentation required: Drivers license or photo ID.
Food pantry service hours: Thursday: 9 a.m. to noon.

*Ruby Snider Ministries*
1773 Mt. Holly Road, Camden, AR 71701
(870) 231-5277

CENTRAL ARKANSAS DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL
Commodity Distribution, 313 Jefferson SW, Camden, AR 71701
(870) 836-3200

PULASKI COUNTY
Village Commons in Little Rock received an ArCOP grant for a community garden at the Young Adult Opportunity Center.

Derek Lewis Foundation in North Little Rock received an ArCOP grant for Cooking Matters.

North Little Rock High School Freshman Campus, on behalf of Arkansas GardenCorps, received an ArCOP grant for NLR Community Farm Storage and Wash Station & NLR Community Farm Livestock Expansion.
Let Our Violence End (L.O.V.E.) in Little Rock received an ArCOP grant for Shannon Hills Farmers' Market.

University District Development Corporation received an ArCOP grant for Farmer Market Fridays.

**SALINE COUNTY**
Churches Joint Council on Human Needs (CJCOHN) is a food pantry serving Saline County residents who meet current income requirements. Food pantry service hours: Tuesdays and Fridays 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. The goal of CJCOHN is to enable people in need to help themselves with assistance during a time of emergency or crisis in their family or by referring them to the agency that can provide the service they need. Requests range from food, clothing, toilet articles, rent, utility assistance, lodging, gas and assistance with medical prescriptions, to cases where personal support and friendship for families is needed to carry them through a time of crisis.

*CJCOHN*
103 E Elm St, Benton, AR 72015
(501) 776-2912

**SEARCY COUNTY**
Searcy County Community Center in Marshall received an ArCOP grant for Growing Wellness Gardens.

**UNION COUNTY**
The Union County Hunger Relief Alliance recently formed in Union County. The main stakeholders are the United Way, St. Mary’s Episcopal Church/Food Pantry, and the Boys and Girls Club. They partnered with the Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance on July 16 to sponsor a Cooking Matters at the Store program at Brookshire’s in El Dorado. More than 250 people participated- the most ever at one location!

**WASHINGTON COUNTY**
The Omni Center for Peace, Justice and Ecology, on behalf of Tri Cycle Farms in Fayetteville, received an ArCOP grant for Crossroads Market & Tri Cycle Farms Cooking Matters.

EOA Head Start in Fayetteville received an ArCOP grant for Garden Welcome Project.

**WOODRUFF COUNTY**
ARcare in Augusta received an ArCOP grant for Woodruff County Cooking Matters.
HELPFUL WEBSITES

Emergency Food Resources/Pulaski County Compassion Resources Directory
http://www.arhungeralliance.org/programs/food-assistance-resources/emergency-food-resources/

Arkansas Food Banks
http://www.arkansasfoodbank.org/

No Kid Hungry (Share Our Strength)
http://ar.nokidhungry.org/

Heifer International
http://www.heifer.org/

AAA of NW Arkansas

Fighting Senior Hunger Coalition – Benton and Washington Counties
http://aaanwar.org/plugins/show_image.php?id=440

Arkansas Rice Depot
http://www.ricedepot.org/

Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance
http://www.arhungeralliance.org/

Arkansas Department of Human Services, Commodity Distribution Unit
https://dhs.arkansas.gov/dco/tefap/default.aspx

Arkansas DHS, SNAP
http://humanservices.arkansas.gov/dco/Pages/SupportServices.aspx

Arkansas Department of Health, WIC Program
http://www.healthy.arkansas.gov/programsServices/WIC/Pages/default.aspx

Arkansas Department of Health, Hometown Health Improvement
http://www.healthy.arkansas.gov/programsServices/hometownHealth/HHI/Pages/default.aspx

Arkansas Department of Health, Local health units contact info
http://www.healthy.arkansas.gov/programsServices/localPublicHealthOffices/Pages/default.aspx

Arkansas Coalition for Obesity Prevention
http://www.arkansasobesity.org/

Growing Healthy Communities – Map
http://www.arkansasobesity.org/ghc/ghc-map/
Appendix 3: Small Group Presenter Index

Lindsey Barnett, Business Process Analyst III, Northrup Grumman; lindsey@lm Barnett.com

Amanda Wells Dawson, MS, RD, LD, Research Dietitian, Center for Translational Research in Aging and Longevity, UAMS; amdawson@uams.edu

Matt Levine, Chief Operating Officer, National Foundation to End Senior Hunger; Matt@nfesh.org

Jerry Mitchell, Executive Director, Area Agency on Aging of Northwest Arkansas; info@aaanwar.org

Shamim Okolloh, Arkansas Foodbank; sokolloh@arkansasfoodbank.org

Jill Pryor, Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance SNAP Outreach Team; jpryor@arhungeralliance.org

Jeff Quick, Food Bank of North Central Arkansas; directorfbnca@centurytel.net

Andrea Ridgeway, MS, RD, LD, CDE, Arkansas Department of Health; andrea.ridgway@arkansas.gov

Michele Rodgers, Arkansas Department of Human Services; michele.rogers@arkansas.gov

Janet Rooker, MNSC,RPN, Clinical Associate Professor, UAMS College of Nursing; rookerjanetl@uams.edu

Glen Shuffield, Hope Outreach Food Pantry

Lynn Sudderth, Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance SNAP Outreach Team; lsudderth@arhungeralliance.org

Lou Tobian, Director for Outreach & Education, AARP Arkansas; LTobian@aarp.org

Victoria Williams, AmeriCorp VISTA, AARP; vwilliams@aarp.org

Dana Wills, Government Affairs Consultant, Wills Law Firm, PLLC; dwillscpa@gmail.com
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Arkansas Senior Resource Directory

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Walmart