

Meaningful Connection and Better Health through Congregate Meals

ACL’s Senior Nutrition Program combats loneliness and social isolation

“Social connection is a fundamental human need, as essential to survival as food, water, and shelter.”

A 2023 Public Health Advisory issued by the U.S. Surgeon General calls loneliness and social isolation a public health crisis, noting that older adults are among the groups at greatest risk. Finding ways to establish meaningful connections, especially as people age, is vital to overall health and well-being. To help address these issues, the Surgeon General encourages people to strengthen their connections and relationships by doing things like “make time to share a meal.”

Funded by the Older Americans Act, ACL’s Senior Nutrition Program helps to combat loneliness and social isolation among older adults. In fact, promoting opportunities for socialization is among the core intents of the Act. Through the Senior Nutrition Program, local providers across the U.S. serve congregate meals — or meals served in group settings, like community centers — where older adults not only receive a nutritious meal but also make meaningful connections and form friendships.

The National Survey of Older Americans Act Participants demonstrates the important role that meal programs play in the well-being of older adults.

“It gets us out of the house, and we feel a part of something. We feel like we still belong.”



- 63% of participants say their social opportunities have increased.
- More than 1/3 say their reason for attending was to see others or not be alone.
- 67% of participants say they see their friends more often.
- Nearly 73% of participants say their health has improved.
- Nearly 86% of participants say they feel better.

Nearly ¼ of adults 65+ are considered **socially isolated.**¹

Social isolation is linked to **high blood pressure, heart disease, depression, and cognitive decline.**²

A lack of social connection can increase the risk of **premature death** as much as smoking 15 cigarettes a day.³

To learn more about the Senior Nutrition Program and its impact on older adults, visit acl.gov/snp.

1 Social Isolation and Loneliness in Older Adults. 2020. National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine.
 2 Social isolation, loneliness in older people pose health risks. 2019. National Institute on Aging.
 3 Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Social Isolation: U.S Surgeon General’s Advisory on the Healing Effects of Social Connection and Community.