



## GAA Fact Sheet:

### Old Age Hunger in the United States

*"Malnutrition costs. It costs older people by exacerbating disease, by increasing disability, by decreasing their resistance to infection, and by extending their hospital stays. It costs caregivers by increasing worry and caregiving demands. The entire country pays for health care costs related to this increase in complication rates, increasing hospital stays, and increasing mortality rates. Malnutrition costs people and it costs dollars."*

-Fernando M. Torres-Gil<sup>1</sup>

#### Definitions

**Food Insecurity**- Limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods or limited or uncertain ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways.<sup>2</sup>

**Hunger**- The uneasy or painful sensation caused by a lack of food. The recurrent and involuntary lack of access to food. Hunger may produce malnutrition over time. Hunger is a potential, although not necessary, consequence of food insecurity.<sup>3</sup>

**Food Insufficiency**- An inadequate amount of food intake due to lack of resources.<sup>4</sup>

#### Statistics

Total Estimated U.S. Population, 2004 <sup>5</sup>	<b>285,691,501</b>
Percent of Population Age 65 and Over, 2004 <sup>5</sup>	<b>12.0%</b>
Number (Percent) of Elderly ≥ 65 Below 100% Poverty, 2004 <sup>6</sup>	<b>3,457,000 (9.8%)</b>

Where Hungry Americans Live (Adult Clients, America's Second Harvest Emergency Food Providers)<sup>7</sup>

- **57% Urban**
- **43% Rural**

Food Security Among Clients' Households With Seniors Age 65 or older<sup>8</sup>

- **48% Food Secure**
- **35.8% Food Insecure Without Hunger**
- **16.2% Food Insecure With Hunger**

**Poverty** has a close connection to hunger, so the many older people living in poverty are at great risk of food insecurity and hunger.

Specific groups of people experience higher than average rates of elderly poverty:

- Older women (**12.2%**), and older people living alone or with nonrelatives (**20.8%**) have higher than average poverty rates.<sup>9</sup>
- Elderly non-Hispanic blacks, Hispanics, and Asian and Pacific Islanders (**21.9%**, **21.8%**, and **10.2%**, respectively) were more likely to live in poverty in 2001 than elderly non-Hispanic whites (**8.3%**).<sup>10</sup>
- Elderly living in rural areas have higher poverty rates than the urban elderly. The gap between the number of elders below the poverty level in urban and rural areas is highest for those age 85 and above. Nearly **20%** of rural elders age 85 and above are below the poverty line compared to **12%** of urban elderly age 85 and above.<sup>11</sup>

**Nutrition** is particularly important for health in older adults because of their increased vulnerability to disease and conditions that may impair functionality. Inadequate diets may contribute to or exacerbate disease, quicken the advance of age related degenerative diseases, and delay recovery from illness.<sup>12</sup>

## Food Insecurity and Insufficiency

Food insecurity and hunger rates among elderly households vary by:<sup>13</sup>

- **Household Composition:** Among elderly households, those composed of two or more elderly people are the most food secure (97.6%).<sup>14</sup> Elderly Households containing elderly and non-elderly members had the highest level of food insecurity (7.9%). Food insecurity rates are higher in households with elderly men living alone (6.9%) and women living alone (6.6%).<sup>15</sup> Of the elderly who lived alone in 2001, over 600,000 lived in food-insecure households. Over 200,000, or one third, of these households experienced hunger.<sup>16</sup> Food insecure households of elderly living alone were more likely to experience food insecurity than food-insecure households containing more than one elderly member (33% v 25%).
- **Income:** Food insecurity among elderly households with incomes below the federal poverty line was more than 12 times greater than that of elderly households with incomes above 185% of the poverty line (22.5% v. 1.8%). The relationship between hunger and income was even stronger, 7.2% of elderly households with incomes below the poverty line and 0.4% of elderly households above the 185% of the poverty line experiencing hunger.<sup>17</sup>
- **Race and ethnicity:** Hispanic and black seniors are more likely to live in food-insecure households compared to non-Hispanic white elderly adults. Food insecurity prevalence was 18.9% for black elderly households, 15.4% for Hispanic elderly households, and 3.7% for non-Hispanic white elderly households. Nearly half of all the differences between these groups can be accounted for by lower incomes among minority households, and by the larger proportion who live in mixed-age households.<sup>18</sup>

- **Location:** Food insecure and hungry elderly households are more prevalent in the South than in other regions of the country, and also more prevalent in central cities compared to suburban areas and locations outside metropolitan areas.<sup>19</sup>

Other factors in inadequate food consumption among the elderly:<sup>20</sup>

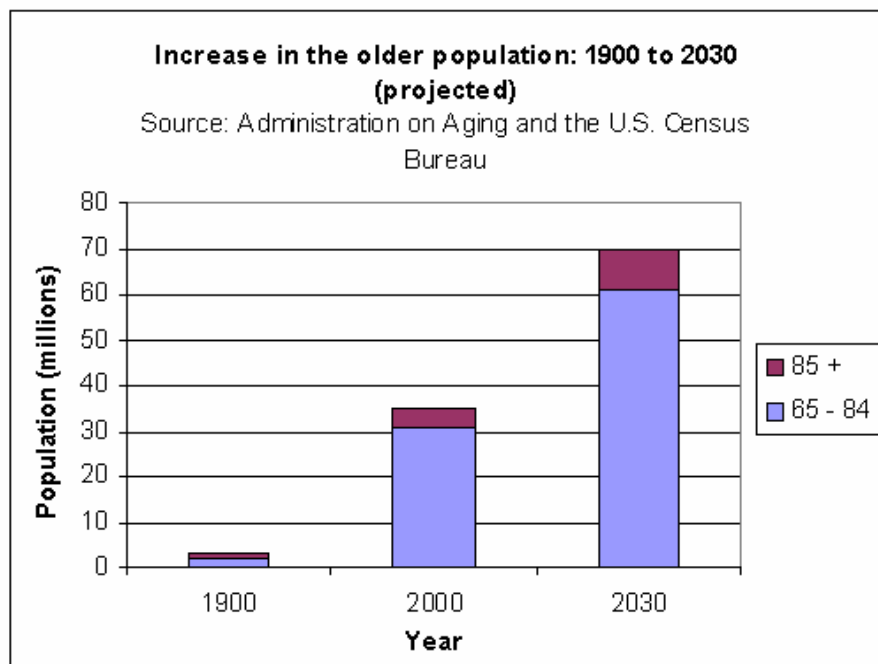
- **Functional impairments:** The inability to acquire, prepare, and eat food is independently associated with food insecurity among the elderly.<sup>21</sup> Limitations on physical mobility interfere with the ability of seniors to shop for and prepare food.<sup>22</sup> Consider, for example, that of the non-institutionalized elderly population in 1997, 21.6 % (6.9 million) could not carry out instrumental activities of daily living, such as making meals and shopping, without assistance.<sup>23</sup>

- **Social isolation:** Typically, fewer calories are consumed at meals eaten alone than those eaten with other people. A reduction in dietary variety, potentially caused by factors like poverty and living alone, is also associated with reduced energy intakes.<sup>24</sup>

- **Reduced ability to regulate energy intake:** Evidence suggests that aging is associated with an impaired ability to regulate food intake. That is, some elderly adults lack the ability to maintain constant energy balance. This, coupled with the possibility that elderly men and women do not experience the sensation of hunger as often during episodes of negative energy balance compared to young individuals, as well as other factors that inhibit energy intake in seniors, can result in weight loss.<sup>25</sup>

**Also, greater susceptibility to depression, reductions in olfactory senses, poor health status, and poor dentition.<sup>26</sup> Growing Elderly Population**

*By 2030, the 65+ population is expected to represent 20% of the entire U.S. population.<sup>27</sup>*



## Information compiled from:

*Almanac of Hunger and Poverty in America 2006: A Comprehensive Guide to National and State Facts on Hunger and Poverty.* America's Second Harvest- Nation's Food Bank Network, Research and Analysis Department.  
[http://www.secondharvest.org/learn\\_about\\_hunger/Hunger\\_Almanac\\_2006.html](http://www.secondharvest.org/learn_about_hunger/Hunger_Almanac_2006.html)

Hunger and Food Insecurity Among the Elderly. *Hunger Issue Brief*, February 2003. Food Security Institute, Center on Hunger and Poverty. Brandeis University. <http://centeronhunger.org/>  
Document: <http://www.centeronhunger.org/pdf/Elderly.pdf>

## Endnotes

1. Torres-Gil, Fernando M. (1996). Malnutrition and hunger in the elderly. *Nutrition Reviews*, 54(1), S7-S8.
2. Anderson, S.A. (1990) Core indicators of nutritional state for difficult-to-sample populations. *Journal of Nutrition*, 120 (11s): 1557-1600.
3. Anderson, S.A. (1990) Core indicators of nutritional state for difficult-to-sample populations. *Journal of Nutrition*, 120 (11s): 1557-1600.
4. Anderson, S.A. (1990) Core indicators of nutritional state for difficult-to-sample populations. *Journal of Nutrition*, 120 (11s): 1557-1600
5. U.S. Census Bureau. *2004 American Community Survey Data Profile Highlights*. Note that this data may differ from data supplied by the Current Population Survey. Also note that 2004 data for Puerto Rico was not available at press time so data was substituted with information from the Census 2000 Demographic Profile Highlights.
6. U.S. Census Bureau. *Current Population Survey, 2005 Annual Social and Economic Supplement. Poverty Status by State Below 100% of Poverty – People 65 Years and Over: 2004*.
7. *Hunger in America 2006*: Draft Report, February 2006. Table 5.3.2.  
[http://www.secondharvest.org/export/sites/harvest/learn\\_about\\_hunger/hunger\\_almanac\\_2006\\_pdfs/Almanac\\_nationalstats.pdf](http://www.secondharvest.org/export/sites/harvest/learn_about_hunger/hunger_almanac_2006_pdfs/Almanac_nationalstats.pdf)
8. *Hunger in America 2006*: Draft Report, February 2006. Table 6.1.1.  
[http://www.secondharvest.org/export/sites/harvest/learn\\_about\\_hunger/hunger\\_almanac\\_2006\\_pdfs/Almanac\\_nationalstats.pdf](http://www.secondharvest.org/export/sites/harvest/learn_about_hunger/hunger_almanac_2006_pdfs/Almanac_nationalstats.pdf)
9. Administration on Aging. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (n.d.). *A Profile of Older Americans: 2001*.  
<http://www.aoa.gov/aoa/stats/profile/2001/2001profile.pdf>
10. Proctor, B.D. & Dalaker, J. (September 2002). *Poverty in the United States: 2001*. U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Reports, P60-214. Washington DC: U.S. Government Printing Office. <http://www.census.gov/prod/2002pubs/p60-219.pdf>
11. Rogers, Carolyn C. (Fall 2002). The Older Population in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Rural America. *Rural America*, 17(3), 2-10.  
<http://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/ruralamerica/ra173/ra173b.pdf>
12. Hunger and Food Insecurity Among the Elderly. *Hunger Issue Brief*, February 2003. Food Security Institute, Center on Hunger and Poverty. Brandeis University. <http://www.centeronhunger.org/pdf/Elderly.pdf>
13. Hunger and Food Insecurity Among the Elderly. *Hunger Issue Brief*, February 2003. Food Security Institute, Center on Hunger and Poverty. Brandeis University. <http://www.centeronhunger.org/pdf/Elderly.pdf>
14. Nord, M., Andrews, M., & Carlson, S. (2002). Household Food Security in the United States, 2001. (ERS Food Assistance and Nutrition Research Report No. 29.) Washington, DC: Economic Research Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture.  
<http://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/fanrr29/>
15. Nord, M. (2002). Food Security Rates Are High for Elderly Households. *FoodReview*, 25(2), 19-24.  
<http://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/FoodReview/Sep2002/frvol25i2d.pdf>
16. Nord, M., Andrews, M., & Carlson, S. (2002). *Household Food Security in the United States, 2001*. (ERS Food Assistance and Nutrition Research Report No. 29.) Washington, DC: Economic Research Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture.  
<http://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/fanrr29/>
17. Nord, M. (2002). Food Security Rates Are High for Elderly Households. *FoodReview*, 25(2), 19-24.  
<http://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/FoodReview/Sep2002/frvol25i2d.pdf>
18. Nord, M. (2002). Food Security Rates Are High for Elderly Households. *FoodReview*, 25(2), 19-24.  
<http://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/FoodReview/Sep2002/frvol25i2d.pdf>
19. Nord, M. (2002). Food Security Rates Are High for Elderly Households. *FoodReview*, 25(2), 19-24.  
<http://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/FoodReview/Sep2002/frvol25i2d.pdf>
20. Nord, M. (2002). Food Security Rates Are High for Elderly Households. *FoodReview*, 25(2), 19-24.  
<http://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/FoodReview/Sep2002/frvol25i2d.pdf>
21. Lee, J.S. & Frongillo, E.A. (2001). Factors associated with food insecurity among U.S. elderly persons: importance of functional impairments. *Journal of Gerontology*, 56B(2), S94 – S99.
22. Nutrition, aging, and the continuum of care – Position of the ADA. (May 2000). *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*, 100(5), 580-595.
23. Administration on Aging. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (n.d.). *A Profile of Older Americans: 2001*.  
<http://www.aoa.gov/aoa/stats/profile/2001/2001profile.pdf>
24. Roberts, S.B. (April 2000). Energy regulation and aging: Recent findings and their implications. *Nutrition Reviews*, 58(4): 91-97.
25. Roberts, S.B. (April 2000). Energy regulation and aging: Recent findings and their implications. *Nutrition Reviews*, 58(4): 91-97.
26. *Hunger and Food Insecurity Among the Elderly. Hunger Issue Brief, February 2003.* Food Security Institute, Center on Hunger and Poverty. Brandeis University. <http://www.centeronhunger.org/pdf/Elderly.pdf>
27. Administration on Aging. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (n.d.). *A Profile of Older Americans: 2001*.  
<http://www.aoa.gov/aoa/stats/profile/2001/2001profile.pdf>

**Global Action on Aging** 777 UN Plaza, Suite 6J New York, NY 10017  
Tel.: 212-557-3163 Fax: 212-557-3164 [globalaging@globalaging.org](mailto:globalaging@globalaging.org) [www.globalaging.org](http://www.globalaging.org)