



Connecting Older Adults with Community-based Resources and Options

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State Funding Cuts Could End Meals for Older Adults

National Nutrition Month, which occurs every March, carries a certain irony this year in Illinois as the Governor, legislators, senior service agencies and older adults themselves contemplate the effects of proposed state budget cuts on meals for older people.

Encased in broader reductions to a variety of senior services is an 11.45 percent cut to home delivered meals.

These meals, which are available to homebound older adults following an assessment of their needs, provided a lifeline to approximately 4,400 older adults in suburban Cook County during the 2010 fiscal year. The proposed cuts could mean 249 of those seniors would lose their meals when they take effect July 1. It could also mean losing their independence.

“Nutrition cuts could mean that people may have to enter nursing homes,” said Jonathan Lavin, AgeOptions president and CEO. He pointed out that nursing home care averages \$44,000 per year, while home delivered meals cost about \$395 per person.

Last year, AgeOptions, the Area Agency on Aging of suburban Cook County, provided funding to community agencies that delivered 664,348 nutritious home delivered meals to older adults throughout the county. The funds come from both the state and the federal Older Americans Act.

If state funding is slashed, each agency will determine the best way for it to absorb the cuts, including taking some people off the program. Other scenarios include eliminating one or two of the five meals most clients receive each week; not taking on new clients; and replacing daily delivery with one weekly delivery of frozen meals, which would also take away the important daily check-in for some people.

Ellin Learned, AgeOptions dietitian, works closely with the agencies to ensure home delivered meals are nutritious and balanced. She said there are several reasons older adults need this service to maintain their health and independence:

- Physical limitations – People who can't see, stand or move around well may not be able to prepare food at home.
- Difficulty shopping – Lack of transportation or difficulty walking around a supermarket may mean an older person will not have enough food, especially fresh food.
- Finances – Older adults with meager budgets may skip meals or eat less.
- Difficulty managing special diets – Special diets can be confusing and older people may not be sure what they can eat and what to avoid. They may not be able to get to stores that have the types of food they need.
- Not knowing how to cook – Men, especially, may not know how to cook.

For many of the older adults who need home delivered meals, there is no alternative. Those who have the number of meals reduced or stopped altogether, or who can't enter the program because of funding cuts, face risks to their health and their independence.

AgeOptions is a nonprofit organization located in Oak Park, IL, that has served the older adults of suburban Cook County and their caregivers as an Area Agency on Aging since 1974. For more information, please visit the Agency website at www.ageoptions.org.

AgeOptions connects adults age 60 and over with resources and service options so they can live their lives to the fullest and remain in their homes as long as possible. As the Area Agency on Aging, AgeOptions serves suburban Cook County, which includes 130 communities within 30 townships and a diverse population of 460,000 older adults. **AgeOptions**, a nonprofit organization, advocates, plans, develops and funds programs and coordinates a network of community-based senior service agencies to ensure an effective and efficient system of service delivery is available. In fiscal year 2009, AgeOptions distributed \$12,641,000 to these agencies. Support is provided through the Older Americans Act, Illinois General Revenue Funds, local funds and individual contributions. **AgeOptions** and its network of agencies are the principal source of information regarding senior services in suburban Cook County.