

FOOD INSECURITY

STUDY FINDINGS

among older adults in rural Indiana [2020] - - - - -

Our research team has been learning about food insecurity among older adults in South-Central Indiana. In phase 1 of our research, we conducted 10 focused discussions with service providers and older adults in Crawford, Greene, Lawrence, and Orange Counties. Below is a brief summary of our preliminary findings.

MAIN FINDINGS

Food insecurity is considered common in all counties. There are individual, communal, and socio-cultural circumstances that cause older adults to experience food insecurity in rural Indiana.

INDIVIDUAL FACTORS

- Physical impairments make it difficult to cook, eat, or get to the grocery store
- Special dietary needs for chronic illnesses are hard to meet
- Solitude and depression reduce appetites
- Loss of a partner and/or income changes can create financial and/or psychosocial burdens
- Technological barriers (e.g., lack of computer or internet access) keep people from finding or applying for assistance
- Prioritizing rent, utilities, and medical costs leaves little money for food

COMMUNAL FACTORS

- Lack of free or affordable public transportation and food delivery options makes it difficult to get food
- Family members move far away and are unable to help
- Loss of congregate meal sites and meal delivery has reduced access to food and important social opportunities
- Food assistance programs do not address the special dietary needs of older adults
- Being unaware of local assistance opportunities keeps people from using them



SOCIO-CULTURAL FACTORS

- Costs have increased while incomes have not
- Income supplements such as SNAP (AKA food stamps) do not meet the needs of older adults
- Eligibility requirements for assistance keep many older adults from receiving needed help
- Pride and shame prevent people from accepting help
- People cook and garden less than in the past and use more convenient and pre-cooked foods

COMMUNITY ASSETS

We found a number of community assets that can improve local food security among older adults. Each community has members with local knowledge of assistance programs and community resources who could act as community guides for neighbors. There are also individuals who provide rides. This could be turned into a ride-share network. Food pantries are available in each county and could work to provide more foods that meet special dietary needs of older adults. Lastly, many people share food with others, helping those in need have access to food as well as social support.