

Testimony from Shirley Chao, Director of Nutrition MA Executive Office of Elder Affairs.

- I appreciate the opportunity to participate in this forum on behalf of NANASP and the New England Reauthorization listening session held at the Jean Mayer USDA Human Nutrition Research Center on Aging in Boston. I want to commend Assistant Secretary on Aging Kathy Greenlee for holding these input sessions.
- The Older American Act has a special connection to Massachusetts; the late Senator Edward Kennedy from Massachusetts and his colleague Senator Claude Pepper from Florida were the first to introduce the legislation to create the elderly nutrition program.
- Each reauthorization has been important. They have allowed the Act to not just be extended, but modernized. However, the 2011 Reauthorization may be the most important one for a whole range of reasons.
- To start, the nutrition program is the largest and most visible core service in the Act, representing almost 40% of the total funding.
- We have a change in dynamics to the program, as participants are getting older, frailer and poorer, yet the future rests with attracting the first wave of boomers.
- We at NANASP are looking at a few possible changes to the Reauthorization. So of course, funding is essential to our future plans.
- The four areas I am going to focus on today are from input at the listening forum.
- Congregate Meals Service. The need for this service is stronger than ever. At our listening session: we heard from seniors in all walks of life. For example, Theresa is blind, but attends congregated meal site at her housing facility for socialization; Lawrence, is a 68 year old writer, who attends a Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) site; Madeline and Ann Marie go to a Haitian site for the food and cultural support. We need to expand the services to a broader and more diversified population.
- Home Delivered Meals Service. The program needs to not only to limit the waiting list, it should also have sufficient funding to expand the services and provide meals for people who have special dietary needs. The people who testified at the listening session ranged from 79 to 104 years of age, (I am going to quote one of the participants): Sam 88, “sometimes I looked at my refrigerator when there was nothing in there, I waited at the door for the meal, and it came to me hot, then I waited for the next, I have lived here for 50 years, and if I didn’t have this meal, I could not stay here”.

- Nutrition Services. We are asking congress to 1) fund nutrition research for the aging, and translate it into practice, 2) promote nutrition education, and 3) provide medical nutrition therapy. The scientists at Jean Myer USDA Research Center for Aging testified that nutrition intervention is one of the most cost effective ways to prevent chronic and infectious diseases and give people ability to live independently. Most importantly, we need to be able to promote these facts to the seniors, especially to the boomer generation for early intervention. We need to look more closely at the existing Title IIID funding, and consider folding it into the nutrition program.
- Transportation. We need to better recognize the essential role of transportation and have this reflected in the Reauthorization. Either under a separate title or possibly separate funding. We lack funding for bringing people to the sites and means to deliver the meals to homebound seniors. 40 years ago when the Act was first enacted, women were not in the working force and people retired at 60, therefore, there are insufficient volunteers to bring people to the site and deliver meal. Yet, the shortage of volunteers today has put many seniors on a waiting list.

In closing, I would like to reemphasize that importance of the Reauthorization should reflect society and current seniors needs.