



1415 Rhoadmiller Street Richmond, VA 23220
804-521-2500

Good afternoon. My name is Mary Penet and I am the Director of Senior Feeding Programs at **FeedMore** in Richmond, VA. I want to thank you for the opportunity to speak on behalf of frail and vulnerable seniors we serve who have limited access to healthy food. This access is critical to managing chronic and acute health conditions that come not only as a part of aging, but also as a response to years of poor nutrition and poverty.

Food insecurity has a negative impact on the health and nutrition of seniors aged 60 and older regardless of income. The 2014 Hunger in America Report for FeedMore identified the many challenges for those living in Central Virginia food deserts. Many have no health insurance and high medical bills; they must choose between paying for food and medications; and the limited access to healthy foods at local corner stores lead many to making poor choices when purchasing food they can afford. Unhealthy diets ultimately lead to chronic illness such as hypertension and diabetes, with 48% reporting Fair to Poor health.

Since 1967, FeedMore's Meals on Wheels has provided more than seven million meals to homebound seniors. We provide more than 300,000 meals to 1,600 recipients each year. While each person is unique, let me tell you a little bit about them:

- **They are elderly:** 25% are over the age of 85, and 17% have been receiving meals for more than 5 years
- **They are socially isolated:** 57% live alone, and 22% receive 2 meals daily, seven days a week
- **They do their best to get by on limited incomes:** Two thirds live below 150% of the federal poverty level.
- **They are not all seniors:** 16% of our meal recipients are under the age of 60. The majority have diet related conditions: diabetes, amputations and loss of vision as a complication of diabetes, renal failure and stroke.

As we age, physical changes occur, influenced by life events, genetics, illnesses and socioeconomic factors. These changes can pose certain nutritional challenges. Foods need to be flavorful and appealing without added fat, salt and sugar. Eating nutrient dense foods becomes increasingly important when calorie needs decline and but needs for vitamins and

minerals remains high. Our meals, prepared fresh daily in our Community Kitchen, are tailored to meet these special needs.

But, as you may have heard, Meals on Wheels is more than a meal. Each year we ask our meal recipients how our meals and daily visit from our volunteers impacts their lives.

- **93% report eating healthier**
- **82% report improved health**
- **99% report they no longer worry or worry less about having enough food to eat.**
- **91% report that Meals on Wheels helps them to remain safely and independently in their home.**
- **86% report feeling less isolated. Why is this important? Studies have found that seniors who felt lonely were 60% more likely to lose their ability to complete Activities of Daily Living and are 45% more likely to die.**

Seniors have a continuum of need based on their health, mobility, and transportation status; therefore different interventions are required in order to meet their needs. Congregate and Home Delivered Meal Programs have been one of the core elements of our national strategy for reducing food insecurity among the elderly for over 40 years. Investment in these nutrition programs through the Older Americans Act help to bend the Medicare and Medicaid cost curves by keeping frail seniors healthier and out of expensive medical facilities. **In Central Virginia, the cost of one hospital stay for pneumonia equates to 14.3 years of home delivered meals.**

As the only umbrella organization in the country with membership in with both Feeding America and Meals on Wheels America, at FeedMore we have the unique opportunity of connecting food bank resources to seniors identified through our Hunger Hotline and Meals on Wheels.

- **79% of food insecure seniors are *not* homebound, and more than half of the homebound are still able to cook for themselves.**
- **33% of those over 60 calling in to our Hunger Hotline report limited transportation to a food pantry or an illness such as cancer or diabetes.**

To improve access to healthy for older adults, FeedMore is launching a pilot program targeting low income seniors residing in food deserts. We will provide 25 pounds of whole grains, lean proteins, fresh produce and reduced sodium, low sugar meal components twice a month to residents of a senior complex and participants of a neighboring congregate nutrition site. With the Commodities Supplemental Food Program not yet available in Virginia, we will utilize TEFAP and purchased food to increase positive health outcomes. In the future we look forward to the

introduction of CSFP to the Commonwealth, as many of the seniors we serve would be eligible to participate.

FeedMore supports the Vision of Meals on Wheels - "An America in which all seniors live nourished lives with independence and dignity." Collaboration is key to successfully ensure that those we serve have resources needed to maintain and improve their health. These kinds of partnerships, with sustainable Federal funding support, including increasing TEFAP and expanding CSFP will improve access to healthy food for all individuals, and promote positive health outcomes at all ages.