



## National Association of Nutrition and Aging Services Programs

1612 K Street, NW Suite 400 Washington, DC 20006

(202) 682-6899 (202) 223-2099 fax

[www.nanasp.org](http://www.nanasp.org)

### ***June 19, 2013 Testimony of Paul Downey, NANASP President & President/CEO of Senior Community Centers in San Diego, to Senate Subcommittee on Primary Health and Aging's hearing, "Reducing Senior Poverty and Hunger: The Role of the Older Americans Act."***

Chairman Sanders, Ranking Member Burr, members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for holding this hearing and inviting me to testify. I wear two hats today: President of NANASP – the National Association of Nutrition and Aging Services Programs – and President of Senior Community Centers in San Diego.

This hearing is important to our hope that Congress will reauthorize the OAA this session. Millions of seniors are able to live in the community or at home by virtue of the services the OAA provides every day.

Senior Community Centers does its part by serving breakfast and lunch – 2,100 meals daily – seven days per week, 365 days per year, to seniors living on an average of \$830 per month. Put another way, 95 percent of the seniors we serve live at or below the Federal Poverty Level or at half the level of the Elder Index in San Diego County which measures income adequacy for basics, including food and housing.

The rent for Single Room Occupancy hotels (SROs) where most seniors we serve live average \$675 per month, leaving about \$150 for all other expenses, including food. Virtually every senior we serve is on the cusp of homelessness. That's why Senior Community Centers also provides a full array of services including case management, chronic disease management, healthcare education, civic engagement, 350 units of permanent supportive housing and 30 units of transitional housing for homeless seniors. Some of these types of services are also funded through the OAA.

But our core service, the one most critical, remains nutrition. Nutritious food keeps seniors healthy and independent. They make fewer visits to the emergency room, spend less time in the hospital and, if we do our job right, may not need costly long-term care. Consider that our average annual cost to provide nutrition services to a senior is just over \$2,000 a year. A single day in a nursing home in California averages \$330. A day in the hospital in California averages \$2,590. Simply put, an investment in OAA is a win-win: seniors are healthy and government at all levels saves money.

Through our meal program, we're able to get eyes on the client on a daily basis. One of my home-delivered meals drivers noted that a 63-year old male client was frequently calling 911. He notified Dr. Pettigrew, one of our physicians. She discovered that this client was what is known as a "hot-spotter" – a frequent user of EMS services. In fact, in 2012, he had called paramedics 59 times at a cost of almost \$104,000 to the City of San Diego.

Dr. Pettigrew's intervention resulted in getting the client a primary care physician and a referral to a psychiatrist – because his primary problem was depression exacerbated by isolation. He now regularly gets meals and participates in activities at our flagship facility, the Gary and Mary West Senior Wellness Center, and the client has called 911 zero times so far in 2013. None of this would have happened without a home-delivered meal.

This illustrates why we see the OAA as not only a social and human service program but also a preventive health program. It has strong ROI. Dollars invested in the OAA do two distinct things: they leverage other sources of funding and they save untold millions in Medicare and Medicaid costs by maintaining older persons in their homes and in their communities. These savings must start to be documented with better data collection.

Also, don't overlook the fact that the OAA is a catalyst for thousands of jobs in non-profit agencies and for-profit vendors who supply the aging network.

Senator Sanders, NANASP supports your bill and we have enjoyed working with your fine staff. S.1028 keeps senior nutrition strong by maintaining separate funding for the congregate and home delivered meals program and by keeping the system of voluntary contributions which ensures that we don't drive away those older adults who need us the most. We also support your bill working to better connect nutrition and transportation programs. Further, we will continue working to ensure we fully protect nutrition dollars especially from diversion into programs not related to nutrition.

Overall, your bill represents a critical opportunity to stand up for seniors and let them know Congress has their back. There are many areas of common ground that we can find to move the OAA forward and we should. However, without your leadership and your bill we would be nowhere.

Let me raise a related issue: sequestration, which is devastating senior nutrition across the country. In California, we are losing 750,000 meals. At Senior Community Centers, our share of sequester is over \$200,000 which puts 70,000 meals at risk. Please end it as soon as possible. Exempt those programs which clearly serve the most vulnerable of our society, such as the OAA nutrition programs. We have gone from being providers of meals to arbiters of who goes hungry and that is wrong.

Thank you.

**Contact Info:**

**Paul Downey, NANASP President & President/CEO Senior Community Centers**  
**([paul.downey@servingseniors.org](mailto:paul.downey@servingseniors.org)) or 619.487.0650**

**Bob Blancato, NANASP Executive Director**  
**([rblancato@matzblancato.com](mailto:rblancato@matzblancato.com)) or (202) 789-0470**

*NANASP's vision is to reshape the future of nutrition and healthy aging.  
NANASP's mission is to strengthen advocacy and education those who help older Americans.*