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## **Older Americans Act Needs Your Support**

We at **Somerville-Cambridge Elder Services (SCES)** know that nutrition plays a pivotal role in maintaining health as we advance in age. In Massachusetts alone, the Commonwealth served 8.6 million nutritious meals to older adults last year with funding support through the Older Americans Act. These meals were served at congregate luncheon programs in senior centers, elder housing, and other community venues where seniors gather. Homebound seniors unable to prepare meals for themselves, received home delivered meals through Meals on Wheels, not only supporting their well-being but assisting them to remain in their homes with dignity and independence.

Statistics collected by the MA Elder Nutrition programs across the state show that close to 67% of the home delivered meals recipients are aged 80 or older and about 75% report the lunch is their main meal of the day. Participants also cited improved health: more than 75% reported eating better, feeling better, or having more energy as a result of the nutrition program. With minimal stigma attached, the program also continues to prove successful in reaching those at highest risk for food insecurity. Approximately 25% of respondents report eating less food on days they do not receive meals.

When the US Congress reconvenes later this month, the reauthorization of the **Older Americans Act** will be introduced. Programs in Massachusetts are particularly interested in retaining the ability to purchase USDA commodity food and receive bonus commodity foods for the nutrition program. Massachusetts is a leader in using commodities to ensure food quality and safety and control meal costs. In 2007, the Older Americans Reauthorization Technical Corrections Act as Public Law 109-116 was introduced by the late Senator Kennedy and Senator Roberts (R-KS). This legislation will be at risk unless it is incorporated into this reauthorization.

With the baby boom population increasing at an unprecedented rate, 2012 is a critical year to guarantee the nutrition and health of older adults in the state of Massachusetts and across the country. The OAA has enjoyed bipartisan support over its more than 45-year history. The 75,000 older adults who received nutritious meals in the Commonwealth last year, including the 2,204 people serviced in Cambridge and Somerville, represent the importance of ensuring that there is no disruption in the renewal process.

Deborah McLean, the Director of Nutrition at SCES states that she is proud to be part of a program that leads to so many positive outcomes for a population that often goes unnoticed. We know we are helping to achieve our goal to keep elders in their homes with a quality life. We encourage the community to learn more about the benefits of the elderly nutrition program by contacting Deborah McLean at [dmclean@eldercare.org](mailto:dmclean@eldercare.org)

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