

## **Food Insecurity Tarnishes Seniors' Golden Years**

Post retirement years are optimistically dubbed the golden years. But those years are no holiday for Durham resident Shirley. At 68 she lives alone in subsidized housing. Her monthly budget falls short of what she needs for a healthy diet so at least once a week she skips meals or cuts the size of her meal. Shirley can't drive so she has to spend money on the county Access van to get to a grocery store. Digestive problems make it a daily struggle to figure out how to afford, access, and prepare the foods she needs and can eat.

Millions of older adults nationwide, like Shirley, are not fortunate enough to have pensions or 401Ks, or they hit physical and mental limitations early in retirement through no fault of their own. For these vulnerable seniors their retirement means living in run-down housing, unable to drive, and struggling with food insecurity—a life that's more a drab gray than golden.

This problem is largely hidden because many seniors, especially those living alone, are reluctant to ask for help. We've seen people living at a level of food insecurity that endangers their health but who don't want to "bother the children." Some may not have family they can turn to or family members are barely making it themselves.

Is senior hunger really a problem here? According to a 2019 study from Feeding America, only three states and the District of Columbia have greater levels of senior hunger than North Carolina. It's hard to imagine, but in our foodie city, an estimated 12,600 older adults, age 60 and older, struggle to get enough food to meet their minimum dietary requirements. Thousands more, who may be above the federal poverty line, still find that healthy food is too expensive, and/or they lack proper nutrition due to mobility limitations, lack of transportation, lack of social contact, and inadequate governmental services and funding.

Senior food insecurity is growing as the baby boom generation ages, and it has far-reaching consequences. Several chronic diseases like diabetes require the right kinds of foods to be properly managed. The AARP estimates that senior food insecurity adds \$130.5 billion to annual healthcare costs—a major financial impact for our nation.

Our neighbors who have worked hard all their lives, yet are living with hunger in what should be their golden years, deserve our help. As older adults we are more vulnerable and often powerless to marshal the resources to sustain a decent quality of life.

That's why End Hunger Durham, Meals on Wheels Durham, and the Durham Center for Senior Life are sponsoring the 2019 Durham Senior Hunger Awareness Week September 22-28 to alert people of the problem of senior hunger. We will speak publicly and work with any individual or group who wants to be part of the solution.

And what are the solutions? They are multi-faceted and we need to do them all. Our public information campaign will include brief presentations at houses of worship and community organizations along with social media messages to build support for solving senior food insecurity. Information will be available at the Durham Farmers Market at Central Park on September 21, and 28 and around the city throughout that week. The

Durham County Commissioners and the Durham City Council are passing proclamations recognizing Durham Senior Hunger Awareness Week.

As people begin to understand the scope of the problem we face in Durham, we believe our community will rise to ensure our older residents never go hungry. For more information and ways you can get involved visit

<https://www.endhungerdurham.org/dshaw>.

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