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**FIRST-EVER DURHAM SENIOR HUNGER AWARENESS WEEK,
SEPT. 22-28, WILL HIGHLIGHT EXTENT, CAUSES AND OUTCOMES
OF SENIOR FOOD INSECURITY IN DURHAM**

(Durham, NC – September 9, 2019) – A public information campaign to bring greater awareness to the growing issue of senior hunger and food insecurity in Durham will be held September 22 through 28. The **Durham Senior Hunger Awareness Week** is an initiative of the Senior Food & Nutrition Committee of the Durham Partnership for Seniors, a coalition of service providers and community volunteers working to improve the lives of Durham County’s older adults.

According to an estimate from the Durham County Department of Social Services, of the 60,000 Durham County residents age 60 and older, 12,600 are at risk of food insecurity due to living at or below 199% of the federal poverty level. Additional older Durham residents may suffer poor nutrition due to mobility limitations, lack of transportation, living in a food desert, lack of social contact, and inadequate governmental services and funding. According to a 2019 study from Feeding America, only three states and the District of Columbia have greater levels of senior food insecurity than North Carolina.

A Hidden Problem

“This problem is largely hidden because many seniors, especially those living alone, are reluctant to acknowledge that they sometimes aren’t getting adequate nutrition,” said Betsy Crites, co-chair of the Senior Food & Nutrition Committee and co-coordinator of [End Hunger Durham](#), one of the nonprofits sponsoring the public information effort.

“With this campaign, we want to educate the Durham community about the extent of senior food insecurity and promote action to help ensure our older residents never go hungry. As people learn about this issue, we hope they will donate their time and money to nonprofits that are addressing this problem and also to join us in advocating for better solutions at all levels of government.”

“Unfortunately, senior food insecurity is growing as the baby boom generation ages, and it has far-reaching consequences,” said Gale Adland, committee co-chair and executive director of [Meals on Wheels Durham](#), which is also sponsoring the public information campaign. “Inadequate nutrition among seniors leads to bad health outcomes, poorer management of chronic diseases like diabetes, and a lower quality of life overall. The AARP estimates that senior food insecurity adds \$130.5 billion to annual healthcare costs so this problem also has a major financial impact for our nation.”

One Senior’s Story

The story of long-time Durham optometrist Dr. Joseph Bazemore illustrates the difference having access to good nutrition can make in a senior’s life. With his medical

(MORE)

background, 88-year-old Bazemore understands the importance of good nutrition. But peripheral neuropathy has taken away the feeling in his legs and feet, making it impossible for him to drive and to safely prepare food at home. “I had to have someone drive me to the grocery store, and I’d ride one of those scooters they have there,” he said. “But then we’d come home, they would leave, and I didn’t have anyone to prepare the food for me. So I was living on lots of canned stuff, mostly soup and vegetables; I wasn’t getting balanced meals regularly.”

Things turned around early this year when one of his physical therapists asked him questions about dietary considerations. “She said we need to get you on Meals on Wheels. And it’s been one of the biggest blessings I’ve ever had,” Bazemore said. “I keep telling myself that when I win the lottery, I’m really going to take care of Meals on Wheels! Having a nutritionally balance hot meal come in every day has been wonderful.”

Campaign Elements

The public information campaign will include public presentations at houses of worship and community organizations and extensive use of social media by participating organizations to spread information about senior food insecurity. Information sheets will be distributed at the Durham Farmers Market at Central Park on September 21, and 28. The Durham County Commissioners and the Durham City Council will pass proclamations recognizing the **2019 Durham Senior Hunger Awareness Week** at their meetings on September 9 and September 16, respectively.

“We will also be writing to – and encouraging others to write to – our federal and state legislators to ask for their action on legislation that would alleviate senior hunger,” said Crites. “For example, we will encourage our members in the U.S. House of Representatives to make passage of HR.1368, the Closing the Meal Gap bill, a priority. Elements of this legislation, sponsored by Rep. Alma Adams of North Carolina’s 12th Congressional District, would significantly improve how the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) works for seniors.”

“At the local level, lack of transportation to get to grocery stores and farmers markets is a significant issue for many of Durham’s older residents,” said Adland. “We are already talking with local officials about this issue and will be encouraging other citizens to advocate for better bus lines and other options that will make it easier for seniors to shop for food.”

For more information on senior hunger, visit <https://www.endhungerdurham.org/dshaw>.

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