

OHIO ASSOCIATION OF SECOND HARVEST FOODBANKS

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HUNGER AMONG OHIO'S GREATEST GENERATION STEERS SUMMIT

Public and Private Groups Come Together to Discuss Solutions to Hunger Epidemic among Ohio Seniors

COLUMBUS – Ohio's emergency food assistance network served 61.5% more seniors last State Fiscal Year than at the start of the Great Recession. Since 2007, older adult's unemployment rates have doubled and 17.8% of jobless workers 55 and older have been out of work for at least 99 weeks as of June 2011, compared to 8.1% of workers under age 35. 19.5% of Ohioans over the age of 50 with incomes below 200% of the federal poverty level were food insecure in 2010.

Recognizing that Ohio is an aging state and that an older adult's health, well-being and ability to live independently in their home is dramatically affected by their nutritional intake, public and private groups from across the State gathered at the Mid-Ohio Foodbank today to continue the conversations started at the first Ohio Senior Hunger Summit held in June 2011 and regional hunger summits held through October 2011. Inviting individuals to the table were summit sponsors, the Ohio Association of Second Harvest Foodbanks (OASHF), Comfort Keepers, AARP-Ohio and the Mid-Ohio Foodbank, along with Summit planning partners the Ohio Association of Area Agencies on Aging, Ohio Department of Aging, Ohio Department of Job and Family Services, The Ohio State University Extension Offices and Ohio Association of Senior Centers.

“We know that hunger is a growing concern for many of our elders and those who care for and serve them. Addressing hunger and food insecurity is a significant component of Ohio's strategy to help our elders maintain their quality of life and independence and continue to be vital members of society,” said Bonnie Kantor-Burman, director of the Ohio Department of Aging. “We know, however, that we need to look at the issues in new ways if we hope to truly put an end to hunger. The Senior Hunger Summit is a great example of government and service agencies at all levels throughout the state seeking innovative and responsive solutions to the issues of our growing and changing older population.”

In an effort to help illustrate the reality of hunger that one in five low-income Ohio seniors face, one of out every five participants were given a color-coded fact card before lunch, signifying their food insecurity. These participants were faced with the prospect of an afternoon of hunger, or the task of relying on neighbors and others in attendance to get their meal.

“At a time when hunger's debilitating outcomes affect such a high number of our State's aging population, the food insecurity exercise illustrates what many Ohio seniors are faced with, some on a daily basis. We must come together to find a solution to this growing epidemic and our Hunger Summits are letting us do just that,” said Hamler-Fugitt. “We must focus our energy on urging our Congressional delegation to fully fund programs that are currently available, such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly known as food stamps), The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP), Emergency Food and Shelter Program (EFSP), the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP) and other safety net programs. We must also work to connect seniors with programs that are currently available. Investing today in these preventative programs will save Ohio and the United States hundreds of billions of dollars in the future.”

Building on momentum from previous statewide and regional Summits, participants were charged at this Summit's close to continue educating elected officials about the importance of nutrition programs and their impact on local communities, continuing these conversations at the local level and working to improve the lives of our State's greatest generation by connecting them with programs that are currently available.

To learn more about the Ohio Association of Second Harvest Foodbanks call 614/221-4336 or visit the worldwide web at www.oashf.org.

About the Ohio Association of Second Harvest Foodbanks

OASHF is Ohio's largest charitable response to hunger, representing Ohio's 12 Feeding America foodbanks and 3,300 member charities including food pantries, soup kitchens and shelters. In SFY 2011, OASHF and its member foodbanks were able to acquire and distribute more than 150 million pounds of food and grocery items.

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