

On July 13, 2015, God's Love We Deliver hosted a viewing party, one of over 600 nationwide, for the White House Conference on Aging. This conference is held every 10 years and is designed to identify and promote actions that will improve quality of life for older Americans. The 2015 conference recognized the importance of key assistance programs for older adults – 2015 marks the 50th anniversary of Medicare, Medicaid, and the Older Americans Act as well as the 80th anniversary of Social Security – while identifying the primary issues that older Americans will face in the next decade.

The White House Conference on Aging has become increasingly important for ensuring the well-being of the steadily increasing older American population. The first conference was held in 1961, during the “baby boomer” era, and conferences have been held every decade since. These conferences have catalyzed the formation of and improvements in pivotal government policies that protect older adults, including Medicare, Medicaid, Social Security, and the Older Americans Act.

Aging Americans already make up a large portion of the population: in 2013, 44.7 million Americans were aged 65 and over and 6 million were aged 85 and over. Over the next 50 years, the number of Americans aged 65 and over is expected to more than double to 92 million, while the number of Americans aged 85 and over is expected to triple to 18 million. Thus, the growing numbers of older Americans demand federal-level measures to ensure their health, security, and quality of life. At God's Love We Deliver, we believe this includes access to food and nutrition services.

Proper nutrition is paramount to the wellbeing and functionality of older adults. Most older Americans (86%) have at least one chronic health condition, and the majority (61%) have two or more chronic conditions. The majority of these conditions are diseases such as high blood pressure, heart disease, and diabetes that are largely preventable through healthy lifestyle choices. Nutritious food choices promote good health while helping to prevent disease and injury among the aging population. Eating well supports a healthy heart, which allows for good circulation, increased energy, and enhanced muscle function. A nutritious diet also promotes a healthy weight and sufficient bone density, reducing difficulties involved in moving and performing activities of daily living. Research has demonstrated that a healthy diet can reduce the risk of osteoporosis, high blood pressure, heart diseases, and certain cancers.

Given the critical role that nutrition plays in later years, God's Love We Deliver provides an essential health service by delivering medically tailored nutrition to chronically ill older Americans living in and around the New York City area. We believe food is medicine. Research shows that our model of delivering nutritious meals to those most at risk for malnutrition because of their illness saves critical health care dollars, by keeping people in their homes when they are sick, rather than in more expensive hospitals or nursing homes. Research has also demonstrated that good nutrition also promotes better health outcomes for the chronically ill. As malnutrition is one of the greatest contributors to hospitalization, re-admission and nursing home care, incorporating food and nutrition services into healthcare planning is critical. Making healthy food more accessible to older adults, especially those who lack the means to obtain and/or cook it, contributes significantly to sustaining and improving the health of the older population. Therefore, the viewing party for this decade's White House Conference on Aging was an excellent opportunity for God's Love We Deliver to highlight the importance of proper food and nutrition services for supporting a positive quality of life for the growing numbers of older Americans who need our help.