

Analysis of interventions addressing the nutrition status of seniors in Ontario

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ABSTRACT: Introduction: Malnutrition, specifically undernutrition, can result from a lack of energy intake. It leads to altered body composition and body cell mass, and ultimately diminished function and impaired clinical outcome from disease. Seniors, defined as age 65 years and older, are particularly vulnerable to malnutrition for many reasons. The global senior population is increasing rapidly and by 2050 it is projected that one in six people will be in this age group. Globally, the prevalence of undernutrition in seniors living in communities is as high as 47.8%. In Canada, approximately 34% of seniors are at nutritional risk. Objectives: To explore programs and services available to seniors living in Ontario, Canada that address malnutrition, identify their strengths and weaknesses, and provide recommendations for improving the effectiveness of these nutrition programs and services for seniors. Methods: We conducted a two-stage literature review. The first stage included a search to identify programs that address malnutrition in seniors in Ontario, Canada's most populated province, and to identify best practices. The results were analyzed by three internal reviewers to identify the most common programs. The second stage was a more detailed search of the four most common programs. Keywords including malnutrition, seniors, nutrition, and meal delivery programs were used in Google, Google Scholar, and PubMed. Results: The four most common programs identified in Ontario were Unlock Food, Meals on Wheels, community kitchens, and community gardens. These programs appear to mitigate factors associated with malnutrition in seniors by increasing the availability of nutritious foods. The degree to which these programs affect change may not be significant enough to reduce the overall prevalence of malnutrition, specifically undernutrition, among seniors in Ontario. Conclusion: While the programs that are currently available support the nutrition of a portion of seniors, they are not sufficient for Ontario's aging population. These programs should be scaled up to expand their reach, standardized across the province, consistent, and tailored to the needs of seniors.

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