



Overview: Community Engagement Nutrition Action (CENA) Program

The Community Engagement Nutrition Action (CENA) program is a new initiative targeting seniors in the West Side of San Antonio. The AARP Foundation awarded a two-year grant to La Fe Policy Research and Education Center (La Fe PREC) in January 2012. The **goal** of the CENA program is to decrease the number of Mexican American seniors who are food insecure through a senior peer-to-peer leadership based *Animador* (community promoter) service navigator and organizing change model. La Fe PREC and collaborative partners, the Martinez Street Women's Center, and the Neighborhoods First Alliance will implement the CENA program to significantly contribute to our understanding of their food insecurity, and demonstrate a senior-based peer-to-peer culturally responsive model to improve food security.

The targeted area is the San Antonio West Side. The 2010 Texas estimated population is 136,000, of which, 93% are Mexican American. Twenty-six percent of the population is over age 50. The area population experiences major disparities in education, income, housing, and health; and data indicates high food insecurity. Financial insecurity, language, transportation, culturally incompetent and poorly coordinated food access exemplify some of the barriers. Nationally, 56% of Latino seniors are financial insecure, and their food insecurity is the highest (26.2%) among all household populations. Among Latino elders it is 15.4% compared to 3.7% for non-Latino White elders. In Texas, Latinos are the fastest growing 'new aging' group who experience major food insecurity disparities (19.5%). The States' total household rate of 'food insecurity' is 2nd worst (4 million) in U.S. Among seniors the state ranks fourth highest at 8.9%.

The CENA program partner organizations will develop senior leadership with the tools to address barriers that contribute to food insecurity and improve the *bienestar* (well-being) and health of low income Mexican American seniors age 50 plus. The activities will include 1) food security, outreach and service navigation, and policy and civic engagement training; 2) informal and formal network development including residents and community/faith-based groups, service providers and policy makers; and 3) applied policy development through resident surveys, senior/provider focus groups, and other available relevant data and information.

Food access, affordability, adequacy and appropriateness are four significant factors that continually require attention to ensure food security. Mexican American seniors encounter disproportionate barriers among these factors thereby contributing to their experience with food insecurity. Our understanding of these experiences and related impact on their health and *bienestar* are important in designing and implementing program approaches to improve their food security.

The primary CENA program objectives are:

1. To train seniors to serve as advocates to promote the utilization of accessible food resources needed by seniors living independently in the community.
2. To empower seniors to utilize multiple community resources to expand their access to affordable and safe food.
3. To enhance, through peer education, the food purchasing capacity of seniors.
4. To advocate for changes in policy that create barriers to accessible nutritionally adequate and safe food.
5. To establish a sustainable informal support network among senior residents that promotes healthy eating, access to affordable food and advocacy to prevent hunger among seniors

The growth of Texas' Latino population and its new aging demographics and *bienestar* condition requires such innovation, not currently available, in order to create opportunities for replication and scalability.

La Fe PREC.CENA Program Overview