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Starving Seniors: How America Fails To Feed Its Aging

MEMPHIS, Tenn. — Army veteran Eugene Milligan is 75 years old and blind. He uses a wheelchair since losing half his right leg to diabetes and gets dialysis for kidney failure.

And he has struggled to get enough to eat.

Earlier this year, he ended up in the hospital after burning himself while boiling water for oatmeal. The long stay caused the Memphis vet to fall off a charity's rolls for home-delivered Meals on Wheels, so he had to rely on others, such as his son, a generous off-duty nurse and a local church to bring him food.

"Many times, I've felt like I was starving," he said. "There's neighbors that need food too. There's people at dialysis that need food. There's hunger everywhere."

Indeed, millions of seniors across the country quietly go hungry as the safety net designed to catch them frays. Nearly 8% of Americans 60 and older were "food insecure" in 2017, according to a recent study released by the anti-hunger group Feeding America. That's 5.5 million seniors who don't have consistent access to enough food for a healthy life, a number that has more than doubled since 2001 and is only expected to grow as America grays.

While the plight of hungry children elicits support and can be tackled in schools, the plight of hungry older Americans is shrouded by isolation and a generation's pride. The problem is most acute in parts of the South and Southwest. Louisiana has the highest rate among states, with 12% of seniors facing food insecurity. Memphis fares worst among major metropolitan areas, with 17% of seniors like Milligan unsure of their next meal.

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