

Caring for The Elderly: A Comparative Review and Policy Implications for Nutritional Fulfillment

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Article Information	Abstract
<p>Article history: Accepted 25-11-2025 Fixed 30-11-2025 Approved 01-12-2025</p> <p>Keywords: <i>Elderly; Basic Food Program; Nutrition Adequacy; Policy Implications</i></p>	<p>Abstract: As individuals age, physiological changes increase the risk of malnutrition, making proper nutrition essential for maintaining health and preventing chronic diseases such as diabetes and hypertension. This study aims to examine the effectiveness of elderly nutrition programs in Indonesia, particularly the Pemberian Makanan Tambahan (PMT) and Posyandu Lansia initiatives, and to compare them with similar approaches in Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia, and the United States. A qualitative research method was employed using a case study approach focused on the in-depth analysis of policies and program implementation in Indonesia, supported by international comparative literature. Findings indicate that Indonesia's community-based programs face significant challenges, including low awareness, limited resources, unequal access in rural areas, and social stigma toward the elderly. Comparisons with other countries reveal that successful programs rely on integrated policy frameworks, availability of trained professionals, technological innovation, and sustainable funding. This study highlights the importance of collaboration among government, healthcare providers, and communities, as well as the need for multisectoral strategies to ensure equitable and sustainable access to elderly nutrition services. The findings offer policy recommendations to strengthen nutrition systems for the elderly through improved governance, increased nutrition literacy, and more inclusive service delivery models.</p>

Introduction

Aging is a natural stage of life, bringing with it physical, mental, and social changes. The World Health Organization (WHO) and Indonesian Law No. 13 of 1998 define the elderly as individuals aged 60 and above. With rising life expectancy, Indonesia's elderly population reached 25.64 million, or 9.6% of the total population in 2019 (BPS, 2019). This demographic shift often called the "silver wave" is reshaping the nation's population structure and placing growing pressure on elderly care systems, particularly as traditional family-based support declines and institutional care becomes more common (Sun & Liu, 2024). Among the many challenges faced by this group, malnutrition stands out as one of the most urgent and complex.

Age-related physiological changes, such as reduced metabolism, diminished appetite, and declining physical function, increase the risk of malnutrition among older adults (Feldman,

2012; Chen et al., 2012). In Indonesia, this risk is further amplified by economic disparities, limited access to health services, and low awareness of elderly nutritional needs (Hidayati, 2024). Malnutrition can manifest in various forms including undernutrition, overnutrition, and micronutrient deficiencies and significantly undermines the quality of life for the elderly.

In response, Indonesia has introduced several nutrition-focused services, notably through Posyandu Lansia, which provides monthly health check-ups, supplementary food, and psychological and spiritual support. These programs aim to meet both the physical and emotional needs of the elderly, encouraging independence and dignity. However, challenges remain such as limited health personnel, low awareness of nutritional changes with age, and gaps in information delivery, particularly in rural areas (Nuraisyah et al., 2017). Additionally, older adults often face stigma, being viewed as unproductive or burdensome. Many also experience loneliness, which has been linked to poorer cognitive health and increased mortality risk (Tsuchiya et al., 2025).

Amid these challenges, empowerment-based approaches are gaining attention. Initiatives like the Elderly School in Semolowaru, Surabaya, and culinary training programs in Pundong, Bantul, demonstrate how education and skill-building can help older adults stay active, informed, and even economically independent (Miftakhul, 2017). These programs reflect a shift in focus—from merely addressing malnutrition as a clinical issue to viewing it as part of a broader effort to improve elderly quality of life and participation in society.

The growing urgency of these challenges has prompted a wide range of scholarly attention. Studies by Sutanto et al. (2023) emphasize barriers such as chronic illness and low compliance with dietary guidelines, suggesting the need for culturally tailored nutrition education. Meanwhile, Nulwita et al. (2022) reveal how local food practices and maternal knowledge often outweigh formal nutritional messaging, pointing to a disconnect between policy and lived experience. At the same time, research by Mahmudiono and Nindya (2024) highlights the role of intersectoral coordination and social support in effective elderly nutrition strategies, while Sefriani et al. (2022) explore the potential and pitfalls of integrated services like Posyandu Lansia.

Although these studies offer valuable insights at both the policy and programmatic levels, there remains a gap in understanding how elderly nutrition care is actually practiced on the ground. Most research has focused on macro-level frameworks or generalized interventions, with less attention to the day-to-day realities of caregivers, volunteers, and the elderly themselves—how they interpret, adapt, and implement nutritional support.

This study addresses that gap by conducting a qualitative, comparative analysis of elderly nutrition practices across different local contexts in Indonesia. Through interviews, observation, and document analysis, the research explores how community-based actors fulfill elderly nutritional needs, how these practices align with national policies like Law No. 13 of 1998, and what factors support or hinder effective implementation. By bringing together policy, practice, and lived experience, this study offers grounded insights to strengthen and sustain inclusive nutrition strategies for Indonesia's aging population.

Method

This study employs a qualitative approach with a case study design to deeply explore elderly care practices, particularly in relation to nutritional fulfillment. Rather than focusing solely on outcomes, the qualitative method allows for a rich understanding of the processes, experiences, and social dynamics that shape nutrition care for the elderly (Creswell, 2014). A case study approach is chosen to enable an in-depth analysis of a specific issue within various

real-life contexts. Several locations—both urban and rural—are selected to reflect diverse conditions and allow meaningful comparisons across settings (Anelda et al., 2023).

Data collection involves three key methods: observation, interviews, and literature review. Observations are conducted in environments where elderly individuals live and receive care, with attention to their eating patterns, interactions, and the surrounding physical and social support systems. In-depth interviews are held with criteria based selection on caregivers, program implementers, and elderly participants to gather insights into daily practices, challenges, and perceptions. In addition, a literature review supports the analysis by drawing from previous research and relevant policy documents.

The data analysis process follows Moleong's (2012) framework, involving data organization, reduction, interpretation, and conclusion drawing. Each source of data field notes, transcripts, and documents is manually reviewed and coded to identify patterns and themes. This iterative process helps ensure that the findings are grounded in context while revealing broader insights about elderly nutrition practices and policies.

Ultimately, this study aims to generate practical recommendations for improving elderly nutrition policy and care services. By capturing the lived experiences of those directly involved and affected, the research contributes to more inclusive, effective, and sustainable approaches to supporting the nutritional needs of aging populations.

Results and Discussions

Fulfilling the nutritional needs of the elderly in Indonesia is a complex issue influenced by various factors, including individual, social, and policy perspectives. Research shows a disparity in access to nutritious food, especially among the elderly who live in rural areas or have economic limitations.

Historically, Indonesian government policies have shown concern for nutritional issues. Various food assistance programs and health services have been rolled out to improve the welfare of the elderly. However, implementing policies in the field often faces obstacles, such as less than optimal coordination between sectors and a lack of community participation. Indonesia has various programs to improve the welfare of the elderly, especially those related to access to and fulfilment of food. This policy has been established nationally through ministries/agencies and at the regional level through regional regulations, governors, and regents/mayors.

One of the main challenges in fulfilling the nutritional needs of the elderly is the negative stigma that still sticks to the elderly. The perception that the elderly are a burden on the family often hinders efforts to meet their nutritional needs. In addition, physiological changes in the elderly, such as decreased digestive function and sense of taste, can also complicate efforts to fulfil adequate nutrition.

1. Various Nutritional Fulfillment Programs for the Elderly

Adequate nutrition is one of the key factors in maintaining the health of the elderly. Old age is often associated with decreased physical and metabolic abilities, so good nutritional intake is essential to prevent malnutrition and other health problems. In Indonesia, various efforts have been made by both the government and the community to support the fulfilment of nutritional needs for the elderly. Three main programs that directly contribute to helping

the nutrition of the elderly through the provision of ready-to-eat food are Supplementary Food Provision (PMT), the Elderly Food Program initiated by the government, and Friday alms and free rice displays implemented by the community.

One of the initiatives carried out by the government to support the nutrition of the elderly is the Supplementary Food Provision (PMT) program. This program was initially intended for children and pregnant women, but several regions have begun to expand its scope to the elderly, who are vulnerable to malnutrition. PMT is an effort to meet the nutritional needs of the elderly who are starting to experience changes in their condition. (Nurhi'mah, et al., 2023)

Nutritional fulfilment services for the elderly through providing food and drinks aim to ensure that their dietary needs are met properly. The Elderly Posyandu usually carries out this activity. The Elderly Posyandu is a program the government provides through the Health Office, coordinated by health centres in each sub-district and managed by social service organizations or groups supported by the community. Activities at the Elderly Posyandu aim to provide services for the elderly, focusing on promotive and preventive efforts while still paying attention to curative and rehabilitative aspects (Notoatmodjo, 2007). Activities at the Elderly Posyandu in fulfilling nutrition give the elderly healthy and balanced food to meet their nutritional needs. In addition to the health aspect, this service also has social and psychological goals, namely, to provide appreciation and attention to the elderly so that they feel appreciated by the surrounding community. With this support, it is hoped that the elderly can feel more confident and develop independence. (Prisca and Agustina, 2024) In addition to PMT, the food provision program is one of the central government's efforts to solve the welfare problems of the elderly in single families. This program is regulated in the Decree of the Director General of Social Rehabilitation Number 74/4/HK.01/6/2023 concerning Guidelines for implementing Food for Elderly Single Families. Elderly single families targeted by this program are individuals registered alone on a family card, with several specific criteria.

These criteria include being poor or underprivileged, 80 years of age or older, registered in the Integrated Social Welfare Data (DTKS), and not having the status of a retiree or family of a civil servant or retired TNI/Polri. In addition, elderly people who meet the requirements must have a Population Identification Number (NIK) and Family Card Number (KK) verified by the Directorate General of Population and Civil Registration of the Ministry of Home Affairs. This program also ensures that recipients are not those who have received assistance from the Family Hope Program (PKH) and the Non-Cash Food Assistance Program (BPNT). With these criteria, this program is expected to reach elderly people who need support, especially those who live alone without the help of other family members. (Social Service, 2023)

This program aims to ensure that the elderly, especially those in vulnerable conditions and unable to meet their nutritional needs independently, have access to nutritious food that suits their needs. Through this food program, the government provides ready-to-eat food or food assistance that can improve the health and well-being of the elderly. This program is also

part of an effort to prevent malnutrition among the elderly and ensure they can live better. The implementation of this program involves collaboration between the central government, local governments, and various social institutions to reach the elderly who need support. (Ministry of Social Affairs, 2013)

The food assistance program initiated by the Ministry of Social Affairs aims to provide food support to single elderly people and people with disabilities in vulnerable conditions. To ensure the smoothness and effectiveness of its implementation, this program collaborates with community groups (pokmas) as partners. Pokmas play an essential role in distributing nutritious, ready-to-eat food to beneficiaries, thus ensuring that they get the nutritional intake needed to maintain their health. This assistance is expected to reduce the risk of malnutrition and improve the quality of life for groups who have difficulty accessing food independently. In addition to meeting basic needs, this program also emphasizes the government's commitment to ensuring that no elderly or disabled person is neglected in fulfilling nutrition and welfare. (Ministry of Social Affairs, 2023)

In addition to government programs, the community also has a significant role in supporting the nutrition of the elderly. One form of assistance that is commonly carried out is through the Friday alms program, where the community voluntarily distributes food to those in need, including the elderly. This program is carried out every Friday as a form of worship and social concern.

The Friday alms program, a noble initiative that has long been a tradition in society, has excellent potential to improve the welfare of the elderly. In addition to being a form of worship, this program also serves as a means of sharing and social care. In the context of elderly nutrition, Friday alms can be a bridge to meet the nutritional needs of the elderly, which are often neglected. With better nutritional intake through Friday alms, the elderly can avoid the risk of malnutrition and various diseases related to malnutrition, which can increase endurance and quality of life. In addition, there is also a free rice display initiative spread across multiple strategic locations, such as mosques, markets, and other public places. This program allows the elderly and the poor to take free food from donors or caring community groups. The food provided is usually rice with simple side dishes that still pay attention to basic nutritional needs. This free rice display initiative is beneficial for the community, and of course, the elderly get sufficient dietary intake, even in a simple form. The food provided usually contains carbohydrates, protein, and vegetables needed to maintain nutritional balance. In addition to helping meet basic food needs, this program also reduces the economic burden for the elderly, who may have difficulty buying nutritious food daily. With the presence of free rice displays in strategic locations, the elderly can more easily access healthy and nutritious food, thus contributing to improving overall health and well-being.

The government and the community have made great efforts to meet the nutritional needs of the elderly. The Supplementary Food Provision Program (PMT) and the elderly food program initiated by the government are real steps in providing adequate dietary intake for the elderly. On the other hand, community initiatives such as Friday alms and free rice displays

also make significant contributions to meeting the food needs of the elderly, especially those who live in areas with limited access to health services.

Although various programs have been implemented, efforts to meet the nutritional needs of the elderly must continue and be improved. It is essential to ensure that these programs run consistently and can reach more elderly people in various regions. The sustainability of these initiatives requires collaboration between the government, the community, and multiple organizations to create a more solid support system for the nutritional welfare of the elderly.

2. Sustainability Analysis

Efforts to fulfil the nutritional needs of the elderly in Indonesia show the commitment of the government and the community to improve the welfare of the elderly group. The Supplementary Food Provision Program (PMT) and the elderly food program initiated by the government are real examples of strategic steps to provide adequate nutritional intake. On the other hand, the community also plays a vital role through initiatives such as Friday alms and free rice displays, which help the elderly meet their daily food needs. This collaboration reflects a shared awareness of the importance of maintaining the health and quality of life of the elderly. For these initiatives to be effective in the long term, a strong commitment from all parties is needed to ensure the program's sustainability so that the fulfilment of elderly nutrition can be carried out consistently and reach more elderly people throughout the region.

However, ensuring that these programs are implemented sustainably and not just temporarily is essential. The program's sustainability will determine the long-term effectiveness of the initiative, especially in reaching elderly people in areas that are difficult to access or have limited resources. To achieve this, good supervision, adequate funding allocation, and support from various stakeholders, including the government, non-governmental organizations, and the wider community. In this way, the nutrition fulfilment program for the elderly can continue to run consistently and provide sustainable benefits.

Based on data obtained through joint interviews with the PENSOSMAS (Community Social Counselor) of the Special Region of Yogyakarta Province, represented by Mr Tuyakatta, he said that the nutrition fulfilment program for the elderly, especially the food program, experienced several challenges that hampered its sustainability. This program was initially run from November 2022 to January 2023. However, after January, administrative obstacles required confirmation from the Ministry, which halted the program. The hasty implementation under the direction of the Directorate General of Social Protection and the Elderly confused the community group (pokmas) level, which was tasked with running the program in the field. Although the government has allocated quite a large amount of funds, several areas in the Special Region of Yogyakarta, such as Bantul, Gunungkidul, and Kulon Progo, have not yet been touched by this program. As a result, this program is now not running at all, with administrative obstacles being the main factor causing stagnation.

The Special Region of Yogyakarta Government, through the Social Service, has also launched a program that focuses on the elderly, with initiatives to increase awareness and

create an environment that is friendly to the elderly. These efforts include outreach at the village level using creative media such as wayang cakruk to convey messages. Although there is an appreciation for the food initiative, the program's institutional capacity is still considered inadequate. The food program that was planned to be continued until now has not been running again, with community groups only playing a limited role without adequate support from the authorities. From an administrative perspective, community groups were formed as an initiative of the Ministry of Social Affairs and strengthened through a Decree (SK) from the Sub-district, which was then forwarded to the Ministry. However, incomplete documents are an obstacle to the smooth implementation of the program. Until now, there have been no other programs at the community group level besides food. Evaluations involving various parties, such as sub-district heads, social services, TSKS (Sub-district Social Welfare Workers), and PKH, showed that there were still several shortcomings related to the management and alignment of beneficiary data (KPM). In some cases, inaccurate data led to sudden adjustments, where recipients who did not meet the criteria were transferred to more appropriate recipients through coordination with the village.

Moving to another area, namely Surabaya, in the program regarding Elderly Meals, according to research conducted by Syaputri and Hariyadi (2020), it was stated that Mayor Regulation Number 19 of 2016 concerning Guidelines for Provision of Meals in the City of Surabaya is a form of government concern for fulfilling food needs for people with disabilities and the elderly in Klampis Ngasem Village, Surabaya. However, its implementation is still not optimal. One problem is that the menu prepared by the Social Service does not fully consider the unique needs of the recipients, so coordination with the health service, health centres, and nutritionists is needed. In addition, updates to the lunch boxes that meet health standards need to be carried out periodically to maintain the quality of food and its nutritional value. On the other hand, community groups tasked with reporting the results of the implementation need to receive training to ensure effective, accountable, and transparent reporting. Improvements in these areas are expected to increase the effectiveness of the program. One way to address sustainability in implementing this program is highly dependent on the availability of nutritious and affordable food ingredients. The government can build strategic partnerships with local farmers and food providers to ensure a stable food supply.

The program can obtain fresh ingredients at lower prices by working directly with food producers while supporting national food security. This partnership also allows for the preparation of more varied and nutrient-rich menus according to the health needs of the elderly. This step will increase the effectiveness of government programs because it ensures consistent supply availability and reduces dependence on unsustainable resources.

In addition, financial support from the government and contributions from non-governmental organizations and private donors are very important to maintain the sustainability of the government-run nutrition fulfilment program for the elderly. An innovative financing model is needed to ensure that the program can run consistently. One alternative is community-based financing, where program funds can be obtained through collaboration with

the private sector, philanthropic institutions, and corporate CSR. With this approach, the government can strengthen program funding while encouraging active participation from various parties in supporting the welfare of the elderly. This ensures the availability of sustainable funds and expands the program's reach so that more elderly people can benefit.

In addition, regarding sustainability, the food program for the elderly through community initiatives, namely Friday alms and free rice displays, has strong potential but requires ongoing support. Both programs rely on voluntary donations from individuals and groups, so consistency of support is an essential factor in ensuring long-term sustainability. A more structured fundraising system is needed for these programs to continue, including collaboration with companies through corporate social responsibility (CSR) programs. In addition, educating the community about the importance of regular contributions can strengthen the collective commitment to supporting seniors in need. With a more organized approach and solid community support, the Friday alms program and free rice display can continue to provide significant benefits for the welfare of the elderly. Community involvement in program planning and implementation is essential to create a sense of ownership and ensure that the program meets the target group's specific needs. By involving the community directly, the Friday alms program and free rice display can be more responsive to the needs of the elderly, such as adjusting the food menu to suit the health conditions of the elderly. In addition, active participation from the community also allows for identifying problems or deficiencies in the program to be addressed immediately. This involvement strengthens social solidarity and ensures that the program is more sustainable because the collective commitment of all elements of society supports it. Through an inclusive approach, these programs can continue to grow and positively impact seniors in need.

3. Forecasting a Better Elderly Nutrition Fulfillment Program

With an increasing elderly population in various countries, including Indonesia, there is an urgent need to ensure their well-being, especially in terms of access to nutritious food. The elderly are vulnerable to health problems and malnutrition, which are often exacerbated by economic conditions, limited access to healthy food, and social isolation. In facing the challenge of fulfilling nutrition for the elderly, many countries and communities have developed various programs to ensure that this age group has adequate access to nutritious food. As the elderly population increases, the need for a sustainable support system becomes increasingly urgent. These programs often face obstacles like uneven distribution, limited funding, and lack of community involvement.

Amidst the various existing approaches, an innovative concept has emerged that is known to be proposed, namely the Universal Basic Food Program (UBF). This program offers a more holistic solution by providing basic food universally to every elderly citizen without economic requirements. Just as Universal Basic Income (UBI) guarantees a basic income for everyone, UBF focuses on access to adequate and nutritious food for every senior, ensuring that they no longer face uncertainty in meeting their daily nutritional needs.

The Universal Basic Food Program (UBFP) significantly benefits seniors, especially in ensuring access to healthy food. Seniors often face difficulty obtaining nutritious food due to physical or financial limitations. This program provides routine access to healthy food to meet daily nutritional needs adequately. In addition, UBFP helps reduce the economic burden on seniors with pensions or minimal financial support because they no longer need to allocate a large budget for food needs. Consistency in nutritious food intake also contributes to improved health and quality of life, helping to prevent or manage chronic diseases common in older age, such as diabetes and hypertension.

Furthermore, UBFP can play a role in overcoming social isolation. By integrating this program with community services, such as home meal delivery or opening food distribution centres in public places, seniors can interact socially, improving their mental well-being. Implementing UBFP requires strategic collaboration, including cooperation with local micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) and farmers in the surrounding area. This provides fresh food ingredients and helps boost the local economy. Technology such as mobile applications or smart cards can also improve distribution efficiency, allowing seniors to collect food rations at specific points or order structured deliveries. Although this program requires substantial funding, integration into existing social security or health budgets can support its sustainability, ensuring it can run effectively and sustainably. In addition to the Universal Basic Food Program (UBFP), there is a program that will be run by the next government, namely the Nutritious Meal Program, which targets children. This program focuses on lunch and covers both times to address the hunger of children who often come to school without breakfast. According to data from the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Human Development and Culture, up to 41% of students in Indonesia are still hungry when studying at school because their parents cannot provide breakfast. Therefore, this program aims to improve children's quality of life and academic achievement and reduce malnutrition rates in the community. (CNN Indonesia, 2024)

The nutritious meal program focused on children can be easily expanded to target the elderly. With an established distribution infrastructure, the program can be extended to provide regular access to healthy food for vulnerable elderly. The government can use the same model, ensuring that the nutritional needs of the elderly are met consistently. This will contribute to improving their quality of life and physical well-being and effectively reduce the risk of malnutrition often experienced by the elderly. Using a model similar to the children's meal program, the government can also ensure that vulnerable elderly have regular access to healthy food, which will contribute to their physical well-being and reduce the risk of malnutrition among the elderly.

The expansion of the nutritious meal program for the elderly has many benefits that have the potential to improve their overall well-being. By leveraging existing infrastructure, such as community centres, nursing homes, and health facilities, the distribution of nutritious food to the elderly can be carried out effectively. The program will also provide food that is prepared with the specific needs of the elderly in mind, such as low-sugar foods rich in fibre,

protein, and micronutrients, which are essential for supporting their physical health. In addition, seniors with financial constraints can reduce their expenses by accessing healthy food for free, thereby reducing their economic burden.

Regarding social welfare, this nutritious meal program can also help reduce the social isolation that seniors often experience by providing them with opportunities to socialize in community centres. However, logistical challenges, especially for seniors living in remote areas or with limited mobility, can be overcome with meal delivery programs, such as the "Meals on Wheels" model in several countries. Collaboration with professional nutritionists and chefs is essential to ensure the quality of the food, followed by regular monitoring and evaluation to maintain optimal nutritional standards and service quality.

Free lunch programs have been successfully implemented in several countries to ensure that school children receive adequate nutritional intake during learning. Examples of meal program implementations in several countries, such as Finland, Sweden, Japan, and the United States, have run free school lunch programs to ensure children receive adequate nutritional intake, improve health, and support academic achievement. Such programs benefit children and help reduce social and economic disparities by providing access to healthy food for all students regardless of financial background. (CNN Indonesia, 2024)

These two programs can complement each other. The Universal Basic Food Program can guarantee access to staple foods every day. At the same time, the free lunch program allows seniors to enjoy a varied and balanced healthy diet, especially when they cannot cook for themselves.

The Universal Basic Food Program and nutritious meals for seniors are critical approaches that can reduce food insecurity among seniors. In addition to positively impacting physical health, these programs can also improve seniors' psychological and social well-being through more frequent opportunities for social interaction. The government can first consider implementing these programs on a small scale, prioritizing the most vulnerable seniors.

This program can be carried out through several strategic steps. First, the government can start with a pilot program in several areas with a high percentage of seniors to test the effectiveness and scope of the program before expanding it nationally. Second, multi-sector collaboration with the private sector, MSMEs, and philanthropic institutions will broaden the program's scope and ensure its sustainability by providing additional resources and logistical support. Third, ongoing monitoring and evaluation of food quality and its impact on the health of the elderly must be an integral part of the program to ensure that the food provided meets the required nutritional standards and contributes to improving the welfare of the elderly. Emerging issues such as informal care for the elderly, social capital, and informal learning underscore the need for nuanced policy approaches that account for the unique dynamics of this sector. (Sulintang et al., 2024)

4. Comparing Policy on Elderly Nutritional Fulfillment

The challenge of ensuring proper nutrition for the elderly is a growing concern globally, including in Indonesia and several other countries with aging populations. In Indonesia, the

government has implemented community-based programs such as Posyandu Lansia and Pemberian Makanan Tambahan (PMT), supported by Law No. 13/1998 on Elderly Welfare. These initiatives provide monthly health services, food supplements, and psychological and spiritual support. Despite their community-driven nature and grassroots outreach, these programs still face significant challenges, including low awareness among the elderly, limited access in rural areas, insufficient funding, and pervasive social stigma. Implementation remains inconsistent, and many elderly people lack the information and empowerment needed to fully benefit from these services.

Thailand, on the other hand, has built a more structured and integrated approach through its Long-Term Care (LTC) policy, developed under the Second National Plan for Older Persons (2002–2021) and supported by the Elderly Act (2003). This policy defines LTC as encompassing social, health, and environmental support for the elderly and includes both formal and informal caregivers. With support from the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), Thailand launched the CTOP and later the LTOP projects, focusing on community-based integrated services. These models include home care, health checks, and social support coordinated by care managers trained under national guidelines. While Thailand's framework is well-developed and backed by universal health coverage, it still relies heavily on informal caregivers and faces disparities in service delivery, especially outside urban areas (Chanprasert, 2021).

In Singapore, a more holistic and individual-centered approach is adopted through innovative programs such as the HOCAMOSE (Homecare and Caregiving Model for Optimising Services for the Elderly). This program incorporates nutrition education, healthy meal planning, social-emotional regulation training, and digital tools to support behavior change. The intervention includes food bazaars, intergenerational games, and direct meal deliveries, aiming to promote self-efficacy and improve participants' knowledge and engagement with healthy eating. Although the program successfully increased nutritional awareness and satisfaction, its impact on participants' long-term dietary behavior (competence) was less conclusive. The model is resource-intensive, requiring high levels of coordination and technological infrastructure (Lee, Robert, Naharudin, Erdt, Vijayakumar & Theng, 2019).

Malaysia also employs a policy-led, community-based model anchored in the Dasar Warga Emas Negara (National Policy for Older Persons), which was revised in 2011 to emphasize empowerment through age-friendly environments and active participation. The Senior Citizens Activity Centre (PAWE) serves as a key platform for elderly engagement, promoting social interaction and health education to prevent malnutrition and mental health issues like loneliness. Despite these efforts, Malaysia faces persistent challenges, such as shortages in trained geriatric professionals, a lack of elderly-friendly infrastructure, especially in rural areas, and limited coordination between government and non-government stakeholders. The National Health Policy for Older Persons complements these efforts by targeting malnutrition and promoting wellness, but greater private sector involvement is still needed for scalability and sustainability (Abdullah, Ismail, & Yusoff, 2024).

In contrast, the United States has one of the most comprehensive elderly nutrition policies through its Elderly Nutrition Program (ENP), authorized by the Older Americans Act. This program provides both congregate meals at senior centers and home-delivered meals, ensuring that participants receive at least one-third of their daily recommended dietary allowances. Services also include nutrition education, screening, counseling, and support such as transportation and shopping assistance. The program prioritizes elderly individuals with the greatest economic or social need and allows voluntary contributions instead of mandatory fees. However, it faces funding uncertainties, regional disparities in service availability, and limited integration with broader long-term care systems. Despite this, the ENP is a well-documented model that has consistently demonstrated its effectiveness in addressing both nutritional and social isolation issues among older adults (Ponza et.al, 1996).

Table 1. Comparative Insight

Country	Delivery Mode	Community Role	Tech/Innovation	Policy Integration	Gaps Noted
Indonesia	Posyandu-based	Strong	Low	Fragmented policy-practice	Funding, awareness, rural reach
Thailand	Community LTC model	Moderate	Medium	Strong inter-ministerial	Caregiver supply, informal reliance
Singapore	Activity centers	High	High (HOCAMOSE)	Research-policy linkage	Mixed long-term diet behavior impact
Malaysia	Community hubs (PAWE)	High	Low	Holistic policy framework	Specialist shortage, rural disparities
USA	Meals-on-Wheels, sites	Moderate	Moderate	Long-established legal base	Budget variability, integration gaps

Source: Processed by Author

In comparing these five countries, several patterns emerge. Indonesia relies heavily on community participation but struggles with consistency and reach. Thailand excels in long-term care policy structure and integration but faces implementation limitations. Singapore leads in technological and behavioral approaches to nutrition but requires more sustainable models for large-scale impact. Malaysia emphasizes social inclusion and policy clarity but lacks infrastructure and professional capacity. The United States demonstrates comprehensive program coverage with measurable impacts, though it must continuously adapt to changing demographics and funding constraints.

From the comparison of the five countries, it is evident that approaches to elderly nutrition are shaped by policy frameworks, institutional capacity, community involvement, and the use of innovation. Countries with more structured and integrated policies such as Thailand and the United States have developed relatively stable and measurable systems. However, they still face specific challenges, including reliance on informal caregivers in Thailand and

regional disparities and funding uncertainties in the U.S. Singapore stands out for its technological and behavioral innovations but struggles with scalability due to its resource-intensive nature. Meanwhile, Malaysia and Indonesia highlight strong community engagement but remain constrained by infrastructure limitations, professional shortages, and weak cross-sectoral policy integration.

These findings suggest that community participation alone is insufficient to ensure effective elderly nutrition programs. A robust support system is essential one that includes sustainable funding, trained professionals, inter-agency collaboration, and locally adapted approaches. Future policy development should therefore focus on collaborative models that leverage community strengths, evidence-based interventions, and structured governance to guarantee equitable and sustainable access to elderly nutrition services.

Conclusion

Elderly people face significant health challenges due to declining body functions, metabolism, and physical limitations that come with age. This condition increases the risk of malnutrition, which impacts decreasing quality of life and increasing susceptibility to chronic diseases such as diabetes, hypertension, and osteoporosis. Although various policies and programs have been designed by the government, such as the Provision of Additional Food (PMT) and the Elderly Posyandu, as well as community initiatives such as Friday alms and free rice displays, these programs still face many challenges. The main challenges include the lack of awareness of the importance of nutrition for the elderly, limited resources and access, and the stigma that considers the elderly as an unproductive group. Collaboration between the government, community, and health workers is needed to ensure the sustainability of nutritional fulfilment programs for the elderly. Efforts to empower the elderly through nutrition education and skills training are also very important to help them remain independent and play an active role in society. With a holistic and sustainable approach, fulfilling the nutrition of the elderly will improve their physical health and support a better quality of life for this growing population.

The comparative analysis of elderly nutrition initiatives across Indonesia, Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia, and the United States reveals that while each country has adopted unique strategies tailored to its socio-political context, common challenges persist. Community-based approaches, as seen in Indonesia and Malaysia, highlight the importance of grassroots engagement but often lack consistent implementation, sufficient funding, and professional support. Thailand's structured policy framework demonstrates the benefits of long-term planning and integration, yet it continues to depend on informal caregivers and faces service disparities. Singapore's innovative, behavior-focused interventions show promise in increasing awareness and satisfaction but require significant resources and infrastructure, limiting scalability. The United States presents a comprehensive and impactful model through the Elderly Nutrition Program, though it is not without issues such as funding instability and regional inequities.

Ultimately, ensuring adequate nutrition for the aging population demands more than isolated programs or policies. It requires a holistic, multi-sectoral approach that combines strong policy design, reliable funding mechanisms, trained personnel, technological innovation, and active community involvement. Cross-country learning and adaptation of best

practices can play a critical role in developing resilient and inclusive systems to support elderly nutrition and overall well-being in a rapidly aging world.

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