



March 9, 2019

The Honorable Mike Pence
Vice President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20500

The Honorable Alex Azar
Secretary
Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Vice President Pence and Secretary Azar:

On behalf of our two organizations representing the nationwide network of senior nutrition programs and the staff and volunteers who provide life-sustaining services to 2.4 million of our country's most vulnerable, at-risk segment of the population, ***we are writing with a sense of urgency about the need for access to supplemental funding, emergency guidance for Older Americans Act (OAA) programs and support due*** to the evolving COVID-19 crisis.

Within the \$950 million provided in the recent Coronavirus Preparedness & Response Supplemental Appropriations Act allocated to support state and local health agencies to prepare for and respond to COVID-19 outbreaks, we urge the following actions:

- Supplemental federal funding be provided and maintained to senior nutrition programs – until no longer needed – to replenish and expand the supply of shelf-stable meals, frozen meals and/or other nutrition services that are being or have already been provided in communities.
- Supplemental federal funding be provided to cover any of these eventualities:
 - additional transportation and personnel costs that would be necessary if sites close where older adults currently receive meals in a group setting (e.g., senior centers, congregate cafes, community dining sites, etc.), as many of those affected will then become home delivered meal recipients;
 - stocking all necessary preventive items at facilities serving meals to older adults (e.g., senior centers, congregate cafes, community dining sites, etc.), and local programs that would continue to deliver meals to homebound clients, ranging from hand sanitizers and moisturizers to masks and additional gloves; and
 - implementation of COVID-19 preparedness plans and community outreach, including specialized guidance and training for staff and volunteers in our nutrition programs and/or via web-conferences.

We would stress that the resources we are recommending be used ***to supplement existing funding*** provided through the OAA and other federal programs. This supplemental was passed to respond to an evolving emergency, and it is important that we recognize the critical role our nutrition programs play in the daily lives of older adults.

Our concerns are magnified after Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) briefings have repeatedly indicated that victimization prospects are higher for those older adults with underlying conditions; and the fact that the majority of older adults served by OAA congregate and home-delivered nutrition programs have multiple chronic conditions and are among the highest-risk populations.

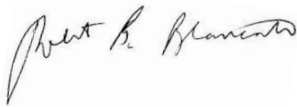
We also call on the Administration for Community Living (ACL) to clarify and quickly disseminate through the entire network existing OAA flexibility and/or establish emergency guidance that allow providers to serve those who are currently healthy enough to make it to a senior center or other congregate site in new ways. This would include alternative nutrition options, such as grab-and-go drive up meals, frozen meals and shelf-stable meals (which may or may not meet current Dietary Guidelines for Americans and Dietary Reference Intake standards), but which could be a life-saver should such seniors be quarantined. If these new forms of services in response to the current emergency be needed and additional costs be incurred, we would expect supplemental funding to be provided.

We recognize the short 30-day turnaround to provide detailed spending plans to Congress, which is why we are contacting you post-haste. We hope you will be responsive to this distinct group of older adults and those upon whom they rely to serve them—the network of 5,000 local senior nutrition programs that we represent and with which we are in regular communication.

It is vitally important that the federal government exercise leadership by providing timely and reliable information and adequate emergency resources down to the community level as we move forward into these uncharted waters.

If desired, we are happy to meet with any officials you designate. We look forward to working in partnership with you, the nutrition provider network, and our healthcare and nutrition industry partners to minimize the risk to vulnerable older adults.

Sincerely,



Robert B. Blancato
Executive Director
National Association of Nutrition and
Aging Services Programs (NANASP)



Ellie Hollander
President and CEO
Meals on Wheels America

Contact Information:
1612 K Street NW, Suite 200
Washington, DC 20006
202-682-6899
www.nanasp.org

Contact Information:
1550 Crystal Drive, Suite 1004
Arlington, VA 22202
703-548-5558
www.mealsonwheelsamerica.org

cc: The Honorable Lance Robertson, Administrator, Administration for Community Living and Assistant Secretary for Aging