



One Page Summary of Testimony of Ellie Hollander, Meals on Wheels America Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP)

The Foundation of the Older Americans Act: Meals on Wheels programs serve as a direct lifeline to older adults struggling with food insecurity, malnutrition, mobility, loneliness, and countless other difficulties of aging. In 2021, local, community-based programs supported by federal funding from the Older Americans Act (OAA) delivered 251 million meals to 2.2 million of our nation's seniors in greatest social and economic need.

OAA Reauthorization Priorities and Recommendations: Our recommendations are designed to protect the core purposes of the Act, underscore its importance as a solution to end senior hunger and social isolation, ensure it is sufficiently funded, and does no harm to seniors or the aging network. Our priorities include:

- Increasing authorization funding levels for all OAA programs and providing additional resources for enhanced nutrition services
- Unifying OAA Congregate, Home-Delivered and the Nutrition Services Incentive Program into a single Title III-C Nutrition Program
- Prioritizing community-based nutrition programs and experienced network providers in OAA grant awards and contracts
- Expanding senior nutrition program capacity and infrastructure support for further integration into the health care system
- Promoting innovations and successful practices learned during the COVID-19 pandemic

Understanding the Unmet Needs of Our Growing Senior Population: Waitlists for OAA nutrition services aren't an accurate picture of total need; waitlists measure pent-up demand, not unmet need.

- One in three local Meals on Wheels programs currently maintain waiting lists, with seniors waiting on average three months for vital meals and 97% of Meals on Wheels programs indicate they believe that there is unmet need in their communities
- Eight out of ten (80.3%) low-income, food insecure older adults are not receiving the congregate or home-delivered meals that they are eligible for and likely need.

The Critical Role of OAA Nutrition Programs: Local, community-based organizations serve a critical role in addressing the nutritional and social needs of our nation's older adults. Most seniors receiving OAA nutrition services report that participating in the program helps them feel more secure, prevents falls or fear of falling, and allows them to stay in their own homes. The impact not only saves lives but also saves taxpayer dollars by ensuring that our nation's seniors can live healthy at home and out of other more costly healthcare settings, helping to avoid preventable emergency room visits, hospital admissions and readmissions, and extended rehab stays, ultimately reducing our nation's health care costs.

- Nearly all (92%) home-delivered meal participants said the meals help them continue to live independently
- One study found that among individuals receiving medically tailored meals, average medical expenditures were 40% lower per month for those receiving meals than for a matched group not receiving meals (\$843 vs. \$1,413)
- The economic burden of senior malnutrition alone costs \$51.3 billion annually (in 2010 dollars), while senior falls account for \$50 billion (in 2015 dollars)
- Almost 95% of older adults have at least one chronic condition, while nearly 80% have two or more chronic conditions. It is estimated that \$73 billion in January 2024 dollars is spent annually on disease-associated conditions.

The Case for Meals on Wheels: [The Case for Meals on Wheels: An Evidence-Based Solution to Senior Hunger and Isolation](#) found that Meals on Wheels programs reduce healthcare utilization and costs, falls, nursing home use, social isolation and loneliness while improving food security, diet quality, and nutritional status and seniors' ability to age in place.