



TALKING POINTS FOR PRIVATELY FUNDED PROGRAMS

KEY MESSAGES TO DISCUSS WITH MEMBERS OF CONGRESS

Inadequate federal funding presents a threat to every Meals on Wheels program across the country – **not just to those that rely on federal funds**. That is why it is critical that the nationwide network comes together and urges Congress to increase federal funding for the Older Americans Act (OAA) Nutrition Program to a total level of **\$1.842 billion in Fiscal Year (FY) 2025**. Below are several key messages you can share with your elected officials if you are a privately funded program or otherwise do not receive OAA funding:

- In 2022, one in six older adults (age 60+) was threatened by or experienced hunger in the United States.¹ Before the pandemic, 7.7 million (age 65+) were socially isolated.² With the older adult population set to reach 112 million by 2060 – when one in three Americans is projected to be 60 and older – the issues of senior hunger, isolation and loneliness will only escalate if left unaddressed.³
- At the foundation of the OAA are public and private nonprofit community-based organizations (CBOs) – like local Meals on Wheels programs – that uniquely and effectively deliver nutrition services, interventions, and social connections to vulnerable seniors. However, it has been widely reported that CBOs are losing OAA contracts to unconnected and disengaged for-profit food manufacturers – like those able to drop ship meals with fewer statutory requirements and simpler (but far less effective) delivery models. In contrast, private and public CBOs who provide meals via the OAA Nutrition Program are required to provide meals that adhere to current Dietary Guidelines for Americans, meet food safety and sanitation requirements, align with regional foodways, are appealing and appropriate for older adults’ physical limitations while providing the case management and social connection vital to improving seniors’ health and reducing costly healthcare expenditures.⁴ **To ensure the continuation and vitality of this essential CBO structure, Congress must ensure that in awarding OAA contracts, prioritization is made for local CBOs that are fully capable of providing services.**
- My program is completely privately funded; however, if a federally funded program in my area can no longer count on adequate federal sources, we will compete for the same pool of limited private sources. This is at a time when we are all facing increased costs for food, fuel and labor. In 2019, **only 1% of large private and community foundation grant funding was given to aging issues**, further underscoring that philanthropy and private dollars alone will not make up for the losses of federal support.⁵
- Demand for home-delivered nutrition services skyrocketed amid COVID-19 for both privately and federally funded Meals on Wheels programs, and, years later, the demand hasn’t lessened for many programs. 7 in 10 Meals on Wheels programs are still serving more home-delivered meal clients than they were before the pandemic.⁶ Nearly all (99%) programs are facing one or more challenges serving meals to all eligible seniors in their community.⁷ Many members are taking drastic steps—such as adding older adults to waiting lists and discontinuing or cutting back services—to sustain their programs amid funding challenges. Over half of members report facing at least one significant barrier, such as rising food prices, funding to pay meals, and recruiting and retaining enough volunteers.⁶
- The enormous surge in demand for services due to COVID-19 required an influx of emergency funding to help senior nutrition programs address the urgent need. However, federal funding is receding while community need remains high and the older adult population continues to grow. Additional cuts to overall federal funding will be disastrous. If federally funded programs in my area are forced to reduce services and turn away clients due to inadequate funding and/or cuts to other

federal programs supporting low-income adults, like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) or Medicaid, more older adults will be at risk of going without necessary nutrition services. Neighboring programs like mine cannot absorb the impact, especially as demand is rising and costs to operate a Meals on Wheels program are increasing.

As we continue to face growing demand for services, we must make the needs of our country's older adults a priority. Lack of federal funding strains privately and federally funded programs alike, and, most importantly, the seniors we serve.

¹ Meals on Wheels America analysis of data from the 2022 Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement, data obtained from U.S. Census Bureau custom tables at <https://data.census.gov/mdat/#/>

² Cudjoe et al., 2020, "The Epidemiology of Social Isolation: National Health and Aging Trends Study", *The Journals of Gerontology: Series B*, <https://doi.org/10.1093/geronb/gby037>

³ "This population is set to reach 91 M by 2030, with 112M expected by 2060" was calculated by Meals on Wheels America using data from Projected Population by Five-Year Age Group and Sex for the United States, Main Series: 2022-2100. Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division. Revised release date: October 2023.

Estimate base is for the resident population age 60 and above on July 1, 2012 in 50 states and D.C. and is used for projecting the U.S. population from 2023 to 2100. Data available in the Census Bureau National Population Projections Tables (Table 3). <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2023/demo/popproj/2023-summary-tables.html>

⁴ Meals on Wheels America (September 2023), The Case for Meals on Wheels: An Evidence-Based Solution to Senior Hunger and Isolation. <https://www.mealsonwheelsamerica.org/learn-more/research/the-case-for-meals-onwheels-sept23>

⁵ Candid, 2022, *U.S. Social Sector Foundation - Funding by Population Served*, <https://candid.org/explore-issues/us-social-sector/money>

⁶ June 2023 Meals on Wheels America member feedback survey, conducted by WRMA.

⁷ Meals on Wheels America 2023 Member Benchmarking Survey