



## 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 **\$1,284,385,000 in FY 2024**. 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 2021, one in eight older adults (age 60+) was threatened by or experienced hunger in the United States.<sup>1</sup> Before the pandemic, 7.7 million (age 65+) were socially isolated.<sup>2</sup> With the older adult population set to reach 118 million by 2060 – when one in three Americans is projected to be 60 and older – the issues of senior hunger and isolation and loneliness will only escalate if left unaddressed.<sup>3</sup>
- 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 both be left to 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.<sup>4</sup>
- Demand for home-delivered nutrition services skyrocketed amid COVID-19 for both privately and federally funded Meals on Wheels programs. 8 in 10 Meals on Wheels programs are still serving more home-delivered meal clients than they were before the pandemic, and many of them 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. Most programs are currently facing at least one significant barrier, such as rising costs of inflation, food and gas, and over half have reported challenges recruiting and retaining enough volunteers.<sup>5</sup>
- 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, this federal funding is receding while community need remains high, and additional cuts to overall federal funding would 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 and 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 unprecedented 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.**

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<sup>1</sup> Feeding America, 2023, *The State of Senior Hunger in America in 2021*, [www.feedingamerica.org/research/senior-hunger-research/senior](http://www.feedingamerica.org/research/senior-hunger-research/senior)

<sup>2</sup> 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>

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, 2018, *National Population Projections*, <https://census.gov/data/tables/2017/demo/popproj/2017-summary-tables.html>

<sup>4</sup> Candid, 2022, *U.S. Social Sector Foundation - Funding by Population Served*, <https://candid.org/explore-issues/us-social-sector/money>

<sup>5</sup> Meals on Wheels America, November 2022, *Fall 2022 Network Pulse Survey*, [www.mealsonwheelsamerica.org/learn-more/research/covid-19-research-portfolio](http://www.mealsonwheelsamerica.org/learn-more/research/covid-19-research-portfolio)