



QUICK FACTS AND KEY MESSAGES

FUND, PROTECT & STRENGTHEN THE OLDER AMERICANS ACT AND OTHER FEDERAL NUTRITION PROGRAMS

BACKGROUND

The Older Americans Act (OAA) Nutrition Program is an effective public-private partnership through which thousands of community-based programs—aided by millions of local supporters and volunteers—are addressing the issues of senior hunger and isolation and promoting the health and wellbeing of older adults. The OAA Nutrition Program ensures that our nation’s older adults live more nourished and independent lives in their own homes, thereby saving the country on costly and preventable healthcare expenditures.

The OAA Nutrition Program and its nationwide network have been essential for the past five decades, and the COVID-19 health and economic crises resulted in skyrocketing demand for services provided by local Meals on Wheels programs and other community-based organizations. Local Meals on Wheels programs are still serving more home-delivered meal clients than before the pandemic, with 1 in 4 serving 50% more than pre-pandemic levels.¹ These programs act as lifelines to their communities and work tirelessly to navigate unprecedented challenges delivering nutritious meals and human connection.

The Fiscal Year (FY) 2023 appropriations bill included an increase of \$100 million for the OAA Title III-C Nutrition Program, for a total of \$1,066,753,000. However, despite serving 2.8 million older adults annually, there are still older adults in need of OAA nutrition services.² We urge Congress to do more and **increase funding for the program by \$218 million to a total of \$1,284,385,000 in FY 2024.**

MEALS ON WHEELS AMERICA 2023 ADVOCACY AGENDA

In addition to increasing federal funding in the next fiscal year, we urge Congress and the Administration to continue providing appropriate and adequate support for the OAA Nutrition Program and other key programs that help serve older adults.

This year, we call on the 118th Congress and the Administration to:

1. Increase funding and support for senior nutrition programs

- Provide adequate funding for the OAA in FY 2024 with a total of \$1,284,385,000 for Title III-C to address increasing demand for nutrition services and higher operating costs. Funding for home-delivered and congregate meals and the Nutrition Services Incentive Program (NSIP) is essential for Meals on Wheels programs, especially with an estimated 86% of low-income, food insecure older adults not receiving the meals for which they may be eligible.³

1550 Crystal Drive, Suite 1004, Arlington, VA 22202 • 888.998.6325
www.mealsonwheelsamerica.org

- Protect other federal funding sources supporting local Meals on Wheels programs, including Social Services, Community Services and Community Development Block Grants, and Medicare and Medicaid home- and community-based services (HCBS).
- Enhance the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP), The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) and the Seniors Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (SFMNP).
- Improve charitable giving and volunteer tax incentives to generate more resources and expand program capacity.

2. Strengthen and secure nutrition access for older adults

- Maintain 100% funding transfer authority between OAA Title III-C home-delivered and congregate nutrition services, as allowed during the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency.
- Modernize OAA regulations to support local senior nutrition programs, including those regarding meal delivery methods (e.g., grab-and-go), and other service innovations.
- Reauthorize the Farm Bill to address senior hunger and malnutrition, including protecting SNAP, improving benefits coordination, broadening access for homebound individuals and enhancing interagency collaboration.

3. Advance food as medicine interventions

- Establish home-delivered meals as a fully reimbursable benefit through fee-for-service Medicare, Medicare Advantage and Medicaid.
- Implement medically tailored meal pilots and initiatives that utilize community-based senior nutrition programs.

QUICK FACTS

Millions of seniors – adults age 60 and older – experience or are at risk of food insecurity and social isolation. According to the most recent information available:

- In 2021, one in eight (13%) seniors, or more than 10 million, faced the threat of hunger (i.e., were *marginally food insecure*), and 7% were *food insecure* or *very low food secure*.⁴
- In 2021, Black and Hispanic seniors experienced hunger at higher rates than those who are white: Black/African American seniors' risk of food insecurity was over three times more than the risk of white seniors, and Hispanic older adults had a food insecurity rate over twice the rate of non-Hispanic seniors.⁴
- In 2021, over 18 million (39%) seniors lived alone⁵, and nearly one in three (31%) seniors felt lonely in 2018.⁶
- In 2020, nearly 2.8 million seniors received Meals on Wheels congregate or home-delivered meals through the OAA Nutrition Program.²
- In 2020, millions of volunteers helped the Meals on Wheels network prepare and deliver more than 247 million congregate and home-delivered meals.²

KEY MESSAGES

1. MEALS ON WHEELS SAVES TAXPAYER DOLLARS.

Community-based senior nutrition programs, like Meals on Wheels, are saving taxpayer dollars by helping to prevent unnecessary trips to the emergency room, reducing falls and hospitalizations, and decreasing the need for nursing home care – costs of which are often borne by Medicare and Medicaid.

Funding Meals on Wheels is a smart, cost-effective investment. Investing a modest amount of federal resources in nutrition and social services for our nation’s older adults could save significantly on healthcare and long-term service costs by preventing adverse health effects and other costly consequences. Poor health outcomes and expenses associated with food insecurity and/or isolation among seniors, such as falls and malnutrition, are particularly costly. **It has been estimated that older adult falls alone cost our nation \$50 billion in medical expenses annually,⁷ and the economic burden associated with older adult malnutrition is \$51 billion annually.⁸**

The OAA Nutrition Program represents one of the best examples of a successful public-private partnership. Meals on Wheels services improve self-reported health; reduce feelings of loneliness and isolation; decrease the rate of falls and fear of falling; help participants feel more safe and secure; and reduce worry about being able to remain in one’s own home. In fact, responses from a national survey among older adults who receive home-delivered and congregate meals report the following positive results:⁹

	Home-delivered	Congregate
<i>Recipients say meals help them...</i>		
Feel better	90%	86%
Improve their health	77%	73%
Eat healthier foods	79%	71%
<i>Recipients say services help them...</i>		
Live independently	92%	82%
Feel more secure	85%	77%
Care for self	82%	76%

2. THE NATION’S MOST AT-RISK SENIORS RELY ON MEALS ON WHEELS

While most older Americans possess at least one risk factor for hunger, malnutrition, social isolation and/or loneliness, the individuals who rely on Meals on Wheels are generally facing greater risk for these threats to their health and independence. The majority of home-delivered meal clients are: women, people over the age of 75, and those who live alone. Meals on Wheels participants are also more likely to have multiple chronic conditions, such as diabetes or heart disease; take three or more medications daily; and experience functional impairment. For most receiving Meals on Wheels, the meals can often make up half or more of their total daily food intake.

The profile of clients receiving **home-delivered meal** services reveals several factors that put them at greater risk of hunger, isolation and/or loneliness:⁹

- 58% are 75+
- 66% are women
- 19% are Black or African American
- 9% are Hispanic or Latino
- 56% live alone
- 17% are veterans
- 28% live in rural areas
- 45% self-report fair or poor health

- 1% are American Indian or Native Alaskan
- 1% are Asian, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- 83% take 3+ medications daily
- 92% self-report 3+ medical conditions

The *More Than a Meal*[®] Pilot Research Study commissioned by Meals on Wheels America found that older adults on waiting lists for Meals on Wheels are more likely to report having the following characteristics, negative health outcomes and related conditions or challenges, compared to the national population of community-dwelling seniors:¹⁰

Characteristics & Health Needs	Seniors on Waiting Lists	Seniors Nationally
Self-report “fair” or “poor” health	71%	26%
Screen positive for depression	28%	14%
Screen positive for anxiety	31%	16%
Report recent falls and/or fear of falling	27%	10%
Report fear of falling	79%	42%
Require assistance with shopping for groceries	87%	23%
Require assistance preparing food	69%	20%
Have home tripping hazards	24%	13%
Have home construction hazards	10%	7%

3. THE GAP GROWS BETWEEN THOSE IN NEED AND THOSE BEING SERVED.

The gap between those struggling with hunger and those receiving nutritious meals continues to widen year after year. In 2019, prior to the pandemic, nearly half of all Meals on Wheels America Member programs reported that they had an active waiting list due to insufficient resources, and 85% of programs surveyed saw unmet need for services in their communities at that time.¹¹

In 2020, about 86% of older adults who would likely benefit most from receiving congregate or home-delivered meals were not getting them, thereby widening the gap even further between those in need and those the OAA network was able to serve at current budget levels.³ Leading up to the pandemic, the OAA Nutrition Program network served 18 million fewer meals to seniors than it did the decade before, due in part to inflation and rising costs of providing services reducing the buying power of federal funding over time.

With the onset of the pandemic in March 2020, the Meals on Wheels network faced unprecedented demand. The surge in demand for services required an influx of emergency funding that doubled federal support to address the immediate need. However, this funding is receding while community need is not, and programs now are struggling.

Today, programs continue to deliver life-saving services at sustained high rates while facing ongoing and emerging challenges and uncertainties. As of November 2022, 8 in 10 Meals on Wheels programs were serving more home-delivered meal clients than they were prior to COVID-19, with 1 in 4 serving 50% more than before the pandemic.¹ Many are taking drastic steps to sustain their programs amid funding challenges. Some of these measures include but are not limited to adding older adults to waiting lists and discontinuing or cutting back services. Most senior nutrition programs currently report facing at least one significant barrier, such as rising costs of inflation, food and gas.¹

While reaching all individuals who need or could benefit from receiving Meals on Wheels is greatly constrained by funding and capacity limitations, the network of programs remains ready and willing to do more with the backing of more resources. Nearly all (97%) local programs believe there are older adults in their community who need meals who they are not currently serving.¹² However, the majority (64%) are confident that they could serve more individuals, if the new clients came with more funding.¹

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES & CONTACT INFORMATION

For more information and resources, please reach out to our Advocacy Team at advocacy@mealsonwheelsamerica.org.

¹ Meals on Wheels America, November 2022, *Fall 2022 Network Pulse Survey*, available at www.mealsonwheelsamerica.org/learn-more/research/covid-19-research-portfolio

² Administration for Community Living (ACL), 2022, *Older Americans Act Title III Program: 2020 Program Results*, <https://acl.gov/news-and-events/announcements/acl-releases-older-americans-act-program-highlights>

³ U.S. Census Bureau, 2020, Meals on Wheels America analysis of data from the *Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement*, https://www.census.gov/data/datasets/time-series/demo/cps/cps-supp_cps-repwgt/cps-food-security.html

⁴ Feeding America, 2023, *The State of Senior Hunger in America in 2021*, www.feedingamerica.org/research/senior-hunger-research/senior

⁵ U.S. Census Bureau, 2023, *American Community Survey (ACS) 1-Year Estimates 2021*, <https://data.census.gov/table?q=s0102&tid=ACSST1Y2021.S0102>

⁶ AARP, 2018, *Loneliness and Social Connections: A National Survey of Adults 45 and Older*, www.aarp.org/research/topics/life/info-2018/loneliness-social-connections.html

⁷ Florence, et al., 2018, Medical Costs of Fatal and Nonfatal Falls in Older Adults, *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society*, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/29512120>

⁸ Snider et al., 2014, Economic burden of community-based disease associated malnutrition in the United States, *Journal of Parenteral and Enteral Nutrition*, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/25249028>

⁹ ACL, 2023, *National Survey of OAA Participants 2022*, available on ACL's Aging, Independence, and Disability (AGID) Program Data Portal, <https://agid.acl.gov/>

¹⁰ Meals on Wheels America, 2015, *More Than a Meal Pilot Research Study*, report prepared by K. S. Thomas & D. Dosa, <https://www.mealsonwheelsamerica.org/learn-more/research/more-than-a-meal/pilot-research-study>

¹¹ Meals on Wheels America, 2019, *More Than a Meal Comprehensive Network Study*, conducted by Trailblazer Research, www.mealsonwheelsamerica.org/learn-more/research/more-than-a-meal/comprehensive-network-study

¹² Meals on Wheels America, 2021, *Comprehensive Network Survey*, conducted by Trailblazer Research, <https://www.mealsonwheelsamerica.org/learn-more/research/member-perspectives-practices-survey>