



DONOR IMPACT REPORT

SEPTEMBER 2020

More than 5,000 local Meals on Wheels programs across the country work tirelessly every day to address the growing issues of senior isolation and hunger. Meals on Wheels America is the leadership organization that supports them, striving to ensure their voices are heard and their needs met, all in service to the millions of vulnerable seniors who are counting on Meals on Wheels to be there for them today and well into the future.

Reaching virtually every community in America, Meals on Wheels delivers nutritious meals, friendly visits and safety checks that enable older adults to live more nourished lives with independence and dignity – in their own homes – where they want to be. Our nationwide network is strengthened by the dedication of nearly two million volunteers who are committed to getting the job done.

By providing funding, leadership, education, research and advocacy support, Meals on Wheels America empowers local Member programs to strengthen their communities, one senior at a time.

A LETTER FROM ELLIE

An imperfect storm upended the way we help our nation's seniors.

In more than 60 years of providing nutrition for both the body and soul, we never expected to have our volunteers, our supply chains and our cupboards literally stripped bare by a deadly pandemic that paralyzed the world in fear.

But it happened.

As the new year began to take shape, in the early months of 2020, and as our programs that provide nutritious meals to over two million seniors in big cities and small towns alike started off on a fresh foot – everything came to an abrupt halt.

Knowing we couldn't give up or turn back, knowing our country's most vulnerable population depended on us day in and day out and that there would be many more joining those ranks, we wondered – how we could rise to the occasion, given the exploding need and the fact that the resources just aren't there? And then there you were... you stepped up to the plate with an outpouring of generosity and showed that [humanity is indeed winning!](#)

Many of you gave without even being asked. You made it possible for our programs to not only continue helping the 2.4 million seniors they were serving before the pandemic, but to increase the number of meals delivered to even more seniors during this epic national health crisis. **We are so grateful for the abundance of support you have provided.**

The report that follows tells the story of our first few months of response to the pandemic. Like me, I hope you feel pride when reading how, with your help, Meals on Wheels programs across the country have risen to the occasion to feed thousands of people they had neither planned to feed, nor had been capable of feeding, when COVID-19 hit. This report also shares glimpses of how local programs put eyes and ears on America's most isolated seniors and reached out to them in innovative ways. In the early, lonely, frightening days of social isolation, our kind and devoted volunteers provided food plus comfort, in a safe and physically-distanced, but socially-connected way, turning a moment in time into a defining moment. It was much, much more than just a meal.

Thank you so much for your incredible support! For over six decades, Meals on Wheels has come to the rescue of seniors in need. But in this story, **you** are our **heroes**. This Impact Report honors your generosity and compassion. Thank you for helping us provide a vital lifeline, a sense of community and the nutrition that millions of seniors are depending on from coast to coast and everywhere in between.

With infinite gratitude,



Ellie Hollander
President and CEO
Meals on Wheels America



THE IMPERFECT STORM

We started 2020 ready for action. For decades, Meals on Wheels America has been advocating for significantly more federal funding to support the health, safety and independence of our nation's most vulnerable seniors. With millions of Baby Boomers turning 60 every year, we have long been aware that our nation lacked adequate resources to meet the current and future demand for services. As the new year began, we could never have imagined that our need to urgently and significantly boost capacity was but a month away.

By late January, COVID-19 was inside U.S. borders and by mid-March, government officials had issued stay-at-home orders in many parts of the country. For Meals on Wheels it was, unfortunately, the imperfect storm. Our clientele, vulnerable older adults, were at greatest risk. Their primary defense became sheltering in place, too often without the support of nearby family and friends, who also needed to isolate. Businesses closed – including thousands of senior centers that offered in-person meal programs. Potentially millions more seniors now needed our home-delivered meal services. Our volunteers were designated essential workers, yet three-quarters of them were age 55+, meaning many themselves were at high risk and no longer able to provide services.


In mid-April, research conducted among the Meals on Wheels America network illuminated the harsh reality of America's food security emergency: 79% of all programs reported that the demand for their services had at least doubled – and some saw increases of over 900%.

Though the challenge our network faced was daunting, most of the newly presented obstacles could be solved with one

solution: additional funding. So, we created the Meals on Wheels COVID-19 Response Fund, and thankfully, people of all means and organizations of all shapes and sizes generously responded. Early on, Jimmy Fallon mentioned our need on *The Tonight Show*; Josh Groban gave a *Billboard* concert; Jane Fonda and Lily Tomlin led a fundraising table read for *Grace & Frankie*, and many other celebrities put voice to our quest for support. Significant gifts from Major League Baseball (MLB) and the MLB Players Association, coupled with donations from AARP and Walmart Foundation gave Meals on Wheels America the quick lift we needed to improve our network's logistical capacity and ability to serve the fast growing ranks of at-risk seniors in their communities. And that was just for starters. Within days, we received generous donations from corporations, foundations, influencers, the media, philanthropists and caring individuals from every walk of life.

Knowing federal funding was essential, our team successfully advocated to Congress and the Administration in support of both the *Families First Coronavirus Response* and the *Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and the Economic Security Acts*. Both pieces of legislation included emergency supplemental funding through the Older Americans Act and other critical provisions to help senior nutrition programs scale for an uncertain but expected increase in demand.

Having made progress on the immediate issue of generating a short-term funding relief valve, we quickly began distributing funds from the Meals on Wheels COVID-19 Response Fund to local programs in hard-hit areas across the country. With that, our national efforts to keep isolated seniors fed across America truly began.



During this epic global health crisis, you made it possible for our programs to not only continue helping the 2.4 million seniors they were serving before the pandemic, but to increase the number of meals delivered to even more seniors.

GETTING FUNDING TO THE FRONT LINES

The Meals on Wheels COVID-19 Response Fund was created at a time of intense and immediate need. By establishing this Fund on behalf of our nationwide network, Meals on Wheels America enabled local programs to stay focused on what was most essential: meeting the critical and emergent needs of seniors within their communities.

In the first few months, the Fund focused on providing emergency grants to Meals on Wheels programs to help them address the needs of the vulnerable senior populations they serve. This was particularly crucial as nearly all programs experienced revenue decreases as planned fundraisers had to be cancelled or rescheduled and recast virtually, costs of meal ingredients, personal protective equipment (PPE) and

cleaning supplies skyrocketed, and demand for meals soared. Ninety-seven percent of programs reported rising costs, primarily in additional food costs and safety supplies/PPE. For many local programs, funding from the Meals on Wheels COVID-19 Response Fund provided the immediate relief that enabled them to go on.

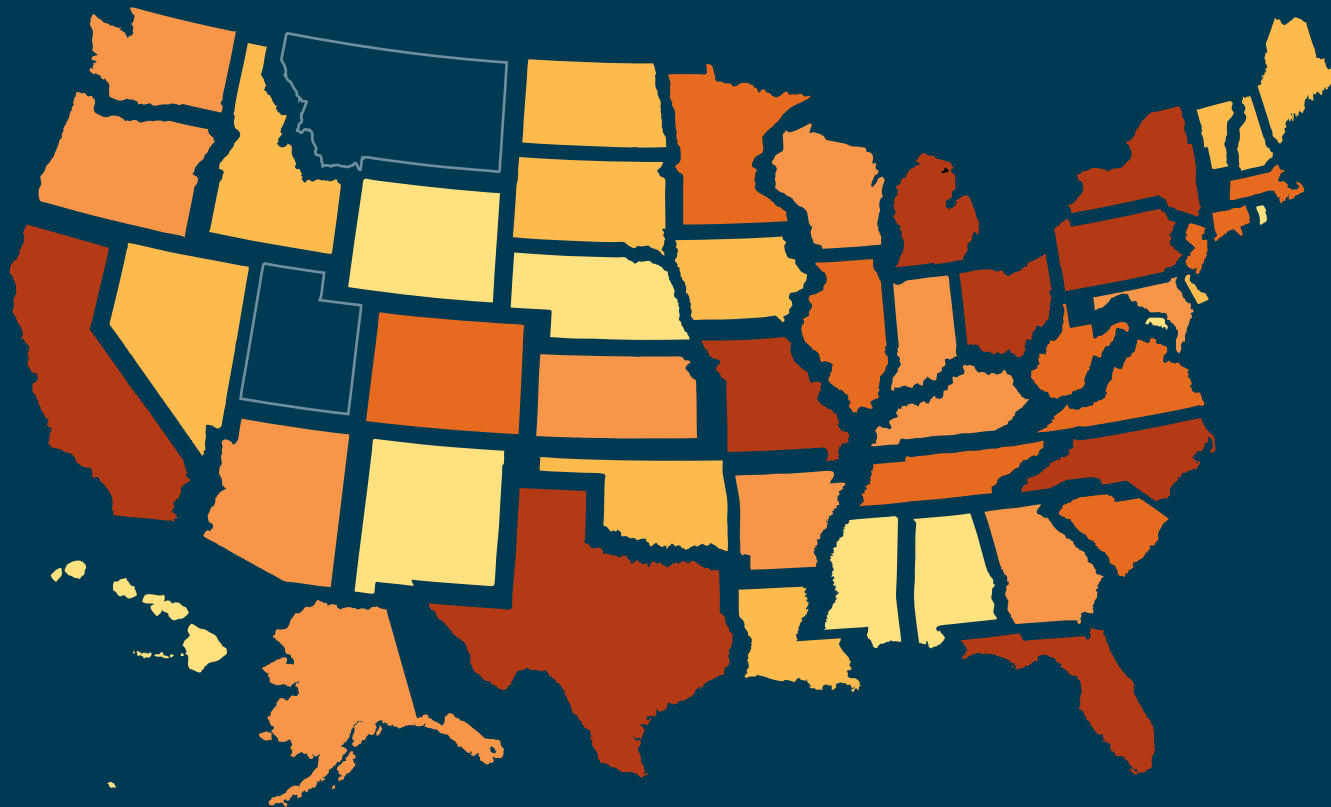
By the end of July, Meals on Wheels America had distributed over \$28 million in 1,022 grants to 611 Meals on Wheels programs across the country. Funds were distributed rapidly, on an almost daily basis, and we responded to every request received within a few weeks of receipt.

"When the coronavirus struck, Meals on Wheels America sprang into action and established its COVID-19 Response Fund. Ever since, corporations, individuals and foundations all across the country have opened their hearts and wallets to help seniors during this unprecedented moment. We've been in awe of their generosity and thrilled to see Meals on Wheels America funnel this support to the frontlines with unprecedented speed, while also remaining transparent and carefully stewarding donor dollars. Together, we are all enabling our nation's most vulnerable people – older Americans – to remain safely at home during this pandemic."

*Patti Lyons,
Board Chair, Meals on Wheels America and President, Senior Citizens, Inc.
Savannah, Georgia*

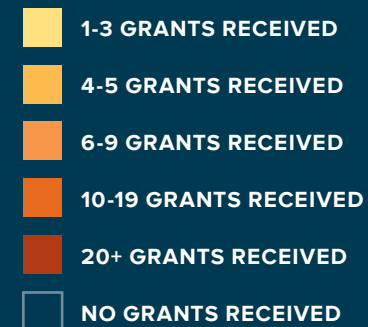
\$28+ MILLION DISTRIBUTED

MARCH-JULY 2020



7,483,091
Additional Meals

487,833
Clients Served



REINVENTING IN REAL TIME

COVID-19 safety guidelines challenged the core of the Meals on Wheels service model. The personal visits and socialization offered to homebound seniors that are the hallmarks of our services were quickly deemed unsafe. Additionally, Meals on Wheels group dining programs at senior centers, for people who need nutrition assistance but are more mobile, were suspended indefinitely. Our volunteer workforce took a huge hit as many were high-risk themselves and needed to isolate. And yet, seniors still had to eat, meals still needed to be provided, Meals on Wheels clients still needed contact with others and Meals on Wheels staff still needed to keep a watchful eye to ensure Meals on Wheels clients' safety. Our network needed to find new ways to serve everyone and turn "social distancing" into "physical distancing" while maintaining social connectedness.

Meals on Wheels programs across the country jumped into action and reinvented their business models overnight. Volunteer teams and routines changed dramatically, and local program managers quickly adapted to address their new realities.

Local programs recruited new personnel, shifted delivery routes, tapped new sources for food and created emergency response plans which have become living documents. With a heightened awareness of safety, meal preparation sites and vans were deep cleaned and managers searched for and acquired PPE so masks and additional safety precautions could become a normal part of working life. Meals on Wheels clients were quickly and continually notified of the changes and reminded of the importance of social distancing and Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and local health department guidelines around safety.

"Local Meals on Wheels programs have been on the front lines of COVID-19, fighting hunger and isolation for our nation's most vulnerable seniors. They've worked tirelessly to adapt and respond to an ever-evolving situation and unprecedented demand for services amidst this crisis."

*- Erika Kelly, Chief Membership and Advocacy Officer
Meals on Wheels America*

THE GREAT PIVOT

Group dining at senior centers closed

- Offered “grab-and-go” meal packs
- Provided drive-through services
- Expanded home-delivery routes
- Added groceries, personal necessities and shelf-stable food with deliveries

Kitchen safety prioritized; facilities closed

- Moved and centralized distribution
- Organized socially distanced packing lines
- Added caterers and/or partnered with restaurants

Thousands of volunteers were at risk and could not work

- Engaged new, younger volunteers
- Hired paid drivers, caterers, callers
- Leveraged those who could still work from home

Social distancing guidelines had to be introduced

- Delivered to the door using safety precautions (knock, step back six feet, wait and wave)
- Added telephone check-in programs
- Offered online activities for clients

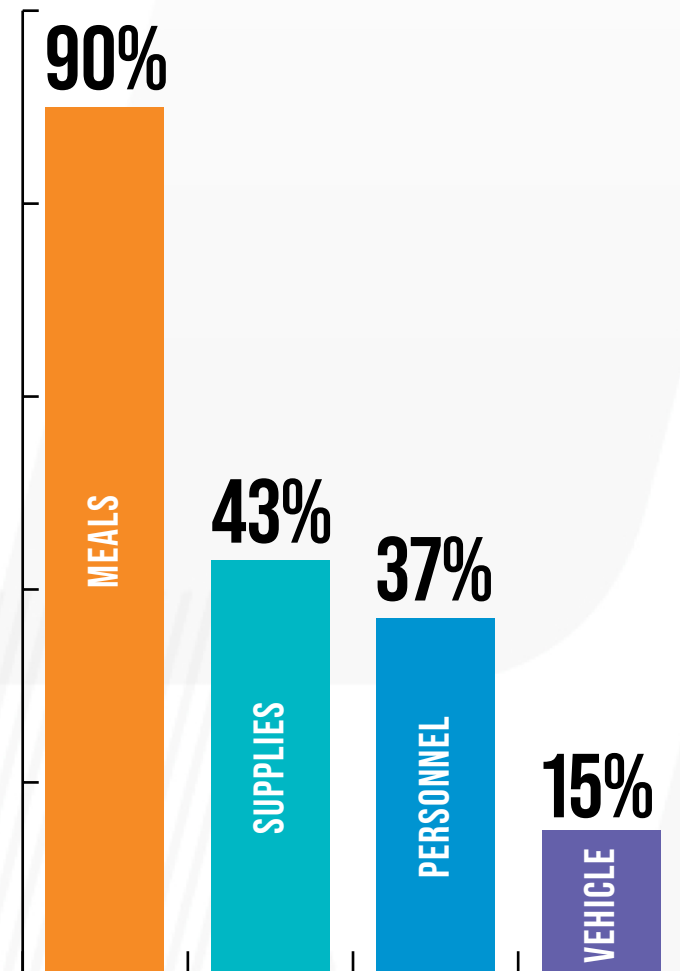
Demand dramatically increased

- Added frozen meals
- Delivered multiple meals at one time
- Expanded production and storage capacity
- Created partnerships to serve more

YOUR HELP CREATED LOCAL IMPACT

Your funds enabled hundreds of community-based programs across the country to rise to the demands of this crisis and continue to deliver on their unwavering commitment to seniors in need. While grant reporting is being submitted on a rolling basis, we have collected and compiled data from 380 programs – as shown below – that give a glimpse into how funds were used in the initial months after COVID-19 hit. Here's some of what your generosity helped support:

- The majority **(90%)** of local programs purchased more food for meals in some form: hot meals, frozen meals, shelf-stable food and groceries.
- Nearly half **(43%)** of local programs were able to purchase a wide variety of supplies that allowed them to safely and rapidly scale up their services. Hand sanitizer and gloves were the most frequently purchased supplies, along with the freezers, refrigerators and packaging that enabled a transition from fresh meals to frozen food, grab and go and multiple meal deliveries. They also bought toiletries and paper products and, for those who have pets, pet food and supplies.
- **37%** of local programs were able to pay for the labor required to meet their heightened demand – they hired drivers, telephone personnel for client check-ins, caterers and paid for the salaries of some staff who were needed to replace older volunteers and who worked extra long hours.
- **15%** was used to cover the costs associated with operating and maintaining a reliable fleet of vehicles that now have to travel many more miles to reach many more seniors.



OUR LIFESAVING MEALS

The coronavirus is serving as a stark reminder that too many people in America are just one day away from their last meal. Meals on Wheels offers daily nutrition to vulnerable seniors whose disabilities or health, geographic, transportation and/or economic situations make it challenging, or impossible, to shop for and prepare food on their own. The pandemic added the additional risk of virus exposure in public places and created fear and concern for our clients and their families. Thank you for your support of Meals on Wheels America and our COVID-19 Response Fund. You made it possible to preserve health and save lives during this crucial time.



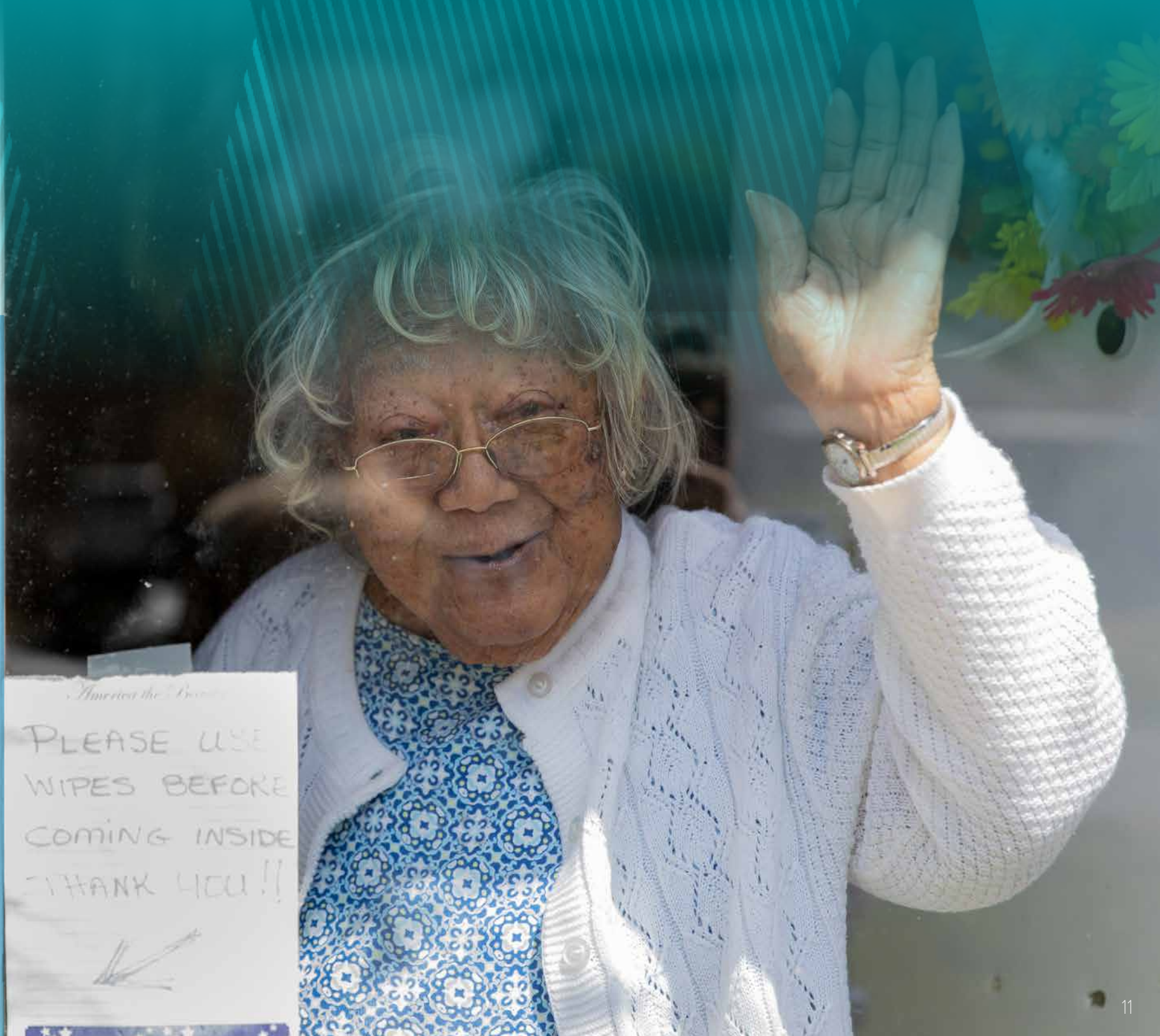
DURING COVID-19 AND ALWAYS ...MUCH MORE THAN A MEAL

Tackling social isolation is a large part of Meals on Wheels' work. Most of us take for granted the joy felt from a quick "How've you been? You're looking good today." It is the human contact that comes with every meal provided by Meals on Wheels that gives life-giving sustenance for the soul.

For many seniors, isolation is not just a condition of the pandemic, it is a way of life. Loneliness and isolation are so harmful that their health impacts are comparable to those of obesity and substance abuse. Loneliness is also associated with increases in heart disease, stroke and high blood pressure.

During COVID-19, nearly all in-person visits and safety checks have been switched to telephone check-in calls out of necessity, except for some unique situations where seniors may be bedridden and very dependent on Meals on Wheels. Regardless, our programs have gone above and beyond to find ways to stay in regular contact and keep their eyes safely on their clients.

Beyond delivering meals and friendly conversation, Meals on Wheels volunteers keep an eye on our clients and take note of anything that indicates they might not be doing well. Incidents are reported up the chain so that appropriate help can be sought immediately. These safety and wellness checks literally enable seniors to live safely at home and have been shown to reduce falls, lessen anxiety and reduce feelings of isolation and loneliness.



America's Best
PLEASE USE
WIPES BEFORE
COMING INSIDE
THANK YOU!!


MARTHA

"I was crying all the time. It's hard to just lay in bed day in and day out with no one. No one. Then Randy and all of you started visiting. I think you saved my life."

Martha was recently discharged from a rehabilitation center with a goal of gaining weight to make sure she stays healthy. When she moved back into her home, she began receiving Meals on Wheels from her local program seven days a week.

Martha suffers from multiple chronic conditions that put her at high risk for COVID-19. As a result, her sister and nephew stopped coming by to visit. That's when her health took a bad turn.

Meals on Wheels volunteers and staff set up a socializing plan for Martha to help reduce the isolation that plagued her. Daily calls and distance visiting while delivering her meals started to brighten Martha's days. "I was crying all the time. It's hard to just lay in bed day in and day out with no one. No one. Then Randy and all of you started visiting. I think you saved my life," shared Martha. "You don't realize how important people are until they are gone. I mean they didn't die, but I don't see them anymore. Everyone's too afraid I'll catch it."

– Family Service Rochester
Meals on Wheels program in Rochester, NY





THELMA

Thelma is a very social elderly woman living on a low income in an urban apartment. She has no family, no engaged neighbors, no car and no phone. She needs assistance to walk. The local senior center was her lifeline for meals, supplies, camaraderie and fellowship until it closed because of COVID-19.

Fearful of the virus, Thelma stayed isolated in her apartment, which was hard on her and started to take a toll. A Meals on Wheels volunteer who began delivering to Thelma in late March provided the first human contact she had received in two weeks. The volunteer safely stayed for 20 minutes and they talked and laughed. While conversing, the volunteer noted Thelma's lack of supplies, her social isolation and her inability to access a phone for communications, so he reported this back to the Meals on Wheels office. The local program manager accessed emergency funding and purchased staples and personal hygiene items for her. A case manager became engaged and was able to provide Thelma with a cell phone.

Had it not been for the Meals on Wheels volunteer assessing Thelma's situation, she may have languished alone and desperate for weeks or months. Although Thelma still misses the senior center, she is now more connected to people, has ample supplies and enjoys her meal deliveries from Meals on Wheels.

– Episcopal Retirement Homes
Meals on Wheels program in Cincinnati, OH

THE STILL-GROWING NEED

Donations to the Meals on Wheels COVID-19 Response Fund to date have enabled us to continue to provide a lifeline to millions of seniors during a desperate time of need. As we write this report, the virus is surging again across the country. The need for our services continues unabated.

Research conducted among a sample of Meals on Wheels programs in July revealed that 64% of Members are concerned about sustaining services without more financial help. Six out of ten are worried about access to safety supplies and delivery labor, and half are worried about being able to operate at the capacity needed to meet the demand. Forty-two percent are worried about the cost of food and access to it.

Failure is not an option. That's why our primary focus at Meals on Wheels America continues to be ensuring that there are adequate resources available to Meals on Wheels programs large and small, rural, urban and suburban, so that no senior is hungry or alone now and well into the future.





64%
CONCERNED

In July, 64% of Meals on Wheels programs revealed that they are concerned about sustaining services without more financial help.


6 of 10
WORRIED

Six out of ten are worried about access to safety supplies and delivery labor, and half are worried about being able to operate at the capacity needed to meet the demand.

42%
DISTRESSED

42% are distressed about the cost of food and access to it.





Your donation to Meals on Wheels honors senior citizens. It supports our staff and volunteers. Your financial gifts have enabled us to build our caring and resilient network, and feed seniors who are isolated and alone during this crisis. Thank you for helping us weather the initial storm. We are not yet out of the woods, but your donations have provided a foundation. We hope you will keep the momentum going, as our seniors need your help... now more than ever.



MEALS on WHEELS
AMERICA

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