



# FACT SHEET SOURCES & METHODS

## SUPPORTING SENIOR HEALTH AND INDEPENDENCE WHILE SAVING MONEY

### Note:

- This fact sheet presents the most recent data available on the topic at the time of publication.
- To provide the most accurate and current information, some data may come from different sources than prior iterations of this fact sheet. Because sources, data collection methods, and reporting vary across sources and years, caution should be used when comparing figures from prior fact sheets.
- The data are estimates and have a margin of error. For some data sources, small changes in estimates are common and should not be overemphasized, as they may reflect differences in samples or methodology rather than a meaningful trend. These fact sheets provide a snapshot of the topic, but changes over time should be interpreted with care.

**Hunger and isolation put seniors at risk for costly health issues.**

- A. “Almost 95% of older adults have at least one chronic condition, and nearly 80% have two or more”** is from National Council on Aging. Chronic Inequities: Measuring Disease Cost Burden Among Older Adults in the U.S. A Health and Retirement Study Analysis. Page 5, Figure 2. April 2022. Data are for adults age 60 and older in 2018. <https://ncoa.org/article/the-inequities-in-the-cost-of-chronic-disease-why-it-matters-for-older-adults>
- B. “Food insecure older adults experience worse health outcomes than food-secure seniors, with greater risk for...”** is from Ziliak, J., Gundersen, C. (August 2021). The Health Consequences of Senior Hunger in the United States: Evidence from the 1999-2016 NHANES. Report for Feeding America. Available from Feeding America: <https://www.feedingamerica.org/research/senior-hunger-research>
- C. “Older adults have the highest rates of social isolation”** is from Pew Research Center analysis of 2014-2017 American Time Use Survey (IPUMS). Data are for Americans age 60 and older. <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2019/07/03/on-average-older-adults-spend-over-half-their-waking-hours-alone/>
- D. “...putting seniors at risk for:**
- E. high blood pressure** is from Shankar A, McMunn A, Banks J, Steptoe A. Loneliness, social isolation, and behavioral and biological health indicators in older adults. Health psychology : official journal of the Division of Health Psychology, American Psychological Association. 2011;30(4):377-385.

- F. **anxiety and depression** is from Santini ZI, Jose PE, York Cornwell E, et al. Social disconnectedness, perceived isolation, and symptoms of depression and anxiety among older Americans (NSHAP): a longitudinal mediation analysis. *The Lancet Public Health*. 2020/01/01/ 2020;5(1):e62-e70.
- G. **cognitive decline** is from Bassuk SS, Glass TA, Berkman LF. Social disengagement and incident cognitive decline in community-dwelling elderly persons. *Annals of internal medicine*. 1999;131(3):165-173.
- H. **dementia** is from Huang AR, Roth DL, Cidav T, et al. Social isolation and 9-year dementia risk in community-dwelling Medicare beneficiaries in the United States. *J Am Geriatr Soc*. 2023; 71(3): 765-773. doi:10.1111/jgs.18140
- I. **“The economic burden of senior malnutrition costs an estimated \$76 billion a year in health care costs”** is from Snider et al. 2014. Economic Burden of Community-Based Disease-Associated Malnutrition in the U.S. *Journal of Parenteral and Enteral Nutrition* 38(2), 77S-85S.
- J. Adjusted for inflation was calculated using the U.S Bureau of Labor Statistics CPI inflation calculator. Costs adjusted from \$51.3 billion in December 2010 dollars to August 2025 dollars.
- K. **“Older adult falls cost the U.S. health care system \$100 billion a year, with most of the cost paid by Medicare”** is from Haddad YK, Miller GF, Kakara R, et al. Healthcare spending for non-fatal falls among older adults, USA, *Injury Prevention* 2024; 30:272-276. <https://injuryprevention.bmj.com/content/30/4/272>
- L. Adjusted for inflation was calculated using the U.S Bureau of Labor Statistics CPI inflation calculator. Costs adjusted from \$80 billion in December 2020 dollars to August 2025 dollars.
- M. **“Social isolation costs Medicare an estimated \$9 billion annually”** is from Flowers, L., Houser, A., Noel-Miller, C., Shaw, J., Bhattacharya, J., Schoemaker, L., & Farid, M. (2017). Medicare Spends More on Socially Isolated Older Adults. AARP Public Policy Institute.
- N. Adjusted for inflation was calculated using the U.S Bureau of Labor Statistics CPI inflation calculator. Costs adjusted from \$6.7 billion in December 2012 dollars to August 2025 dollars.
- O. **“The estimated economic value of family caregivers’ unpaid contributions is approximately \$600 billion”** is from Reinhard, Susan C., Selena Caldera, Ari Houser, and Rita B. Choula. Valuing the Invaluable 2023 Update: Strengthening Supports for Family Caregivers. Washington, DC: AARP Public Policy Institute. March 8, 2023. <https://doi.org/10.26419/ppi.00082.006>

**Meals on Wheels is the solution**

- P. **“Meals on Wheels is proven to:”** data points are from Meals on Wheels America. (2023). *The Case for Meals on Wheels: An Evidence-Based Solution to Senior Hunger*

and Isolation. Available at: <https://www.mealsonwheelsamerica.org/research/the-case-for-meals-on-wheels/>

**Q. Cost of serving a senior Meals on Wheels for a year** is based on an inflation-adjusted meal cost estimated calculated using the national meal cost averages for congregate and home-delivered meals from *Older Americans Act Nutrition Programs Evaluation: Meal Cost Analysis*, a report prepared for HHS Administration for Community Living's (ACL) Administration on Aging by Mathematica Policy Research (2015). The estimate both the costs of purchased resources and value of donated resources of a meal, including donated volunteer labor and non-labor resources and is not necessarily reflective of the paid cost. Estimate reflects the estimated cost for one meal per recipient per day, with 250 operating service days per year. To calculate the estimate, we applied the following calculations and information sources:

- We started with base estimates for both congregate and home-delivered meals, using the respective national per-meal cost averages reported in ACL's *Meal Cost Analysis* report available at: <https://acl.gov/sites/default/files/programs/2017-02/NSP-Meal-Cost-Analysis.pdf>.
  - Congregate meal: \$10.69
  - Home-delivered meal: \$11.06
- We adjusted those estimates from Jan 2015 dollars to January 2023 dollars using the Bureau of Labor Statistics BLS CPI calculator, available at [https://www.bls.gov/data/inflation\\_calculator.htm](https://www.bls.gov/data/inflation_calculator.htm).
  - Congregate meal: \$10.69 in 2015 has same buying power as \$13.68 in 2023
  - Home-delivered meal: \$11.06 has same buying power as \$14.16 in 2023
- We calculated a weight factor for the congregate and home-delivered meal cost averages based on the relative proportion of the type of meal served in 2023 (see "Meals served annually"), then applied each factor to the respective cost average).
  - Congregate meal: 57,009,421 meals served / 237,695,352 total meals = 23.98%.  $\$13.68 \times 23.98 = \$3.28$
  - Home-delivered meal: 180,685,931 meals served / 237,695,352 total meals = 76.02%.  $\$14.16 \times 76.02\% = \$10.76$
- We added congregate and home-delivered components together for an aggregated average per-meal cost then multiplied by 250 service days.
  - $\$3.28 + \$10.76 = \$14.04 \times 250 \text{ service days} = \$3,511.22 \text{ per year}$

**R. "Cost of 1 day in a hospital"** is Kaiser Family Foundation (KFF) State health Facts website, Hospital Adjusted Expenses per Inpatient Day. Data are for the United States in 2023. Data are from a special data request for the American Hospital Association from KFF. Data available at the KFF State Health Facts website: <https://www.kff.org/health-costs/state-indicator/expenses-per-inpatient-day/>. \$3,312

per day.

- S. **“Cost of 10 days in a nursing home”** is from the Genworth 2023 Cost of Care survey. Estimate reflects the daily cost of nursing home care for a semi-private room multiplied by 10 days (\$285/day x 10 day = \$3,420 for 12 days). Report available at: <https://www.riskeducation.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Genworth-Cost-of-Care-Survey-2023.pdf>
- T. **“Of home-delivered meal participants: % say”** and **“of congregate participants: % say”** statistics are from Meals on Wheels America analysis of data from the 2023 Administration for Community Living (ACL) National Survey of Older Americans Act (OAA) Participants. Figures are based on weighted data from the responses of a nationally representative sample of clients receiving meals funded through Title III of the OAA (weighted data). Data obtained through special request from ACL.
- U. **“85% of Americans support federal funding for home-delivered meals through the Older Americans Act”** and **“87% of Americans support federal funding for congregate meals through the Older Americans Act”** statistics are from The John A. Hartford Foundation, Age-Friendly Insights Poll: Bipartisan Public Support for Older Americans Act Programs (2025). Available at: [https://www.johnahartford.org/resources/view/age-friendly-insights-poll-bipartisan-public-support-for-older-americans-act-programs?utm\\_source=The+John+A.+Hartford+Foundation+Email+List&utm\\_campaign=f0472c9258-AFI\\_OAA\\_EAlert&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=0\\_c762038350-f0472c9258-119134585](https://www.johnahartford.org/resources/view/age-friendly-insights-poll-bipartisan-public-support-for-older-americans-act-programs?utm_source=The+John+A.+Hartford+Foundation+Email+List&utm_campaign=f0472c9258-AFI_OAA_EAlert&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_c762038350-f0472c9258-119134585)

**But seniors are waiting.**

- V. **“Nearly 14 million seniors are threatened by or experience hunger”** is from Meals on Wheels America analysis of data from the December 2024 Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement. Data include adults age 60 and older who were categorized as having experienced “marginal food security,” “Low food security” and/or “Very low food security.” Data available at: [https://www.census.gov/data/datasets/time-series/demo/cps/cps-supp\\_cps-repwgt/cps-food-security.html](https://www.census.gov/data/datasets/time-series/demo/cps/cps-supp_cps-repwgt/cps-food-security.html) Retrieved 1/26/2026. Note: you will need statistical software to analyze the data.
- W. **“56% of seniors feel lonely”** is from Meals on Wheels America analysis of data from the 2022 Health and Retirement Study (HRS), weighted data. Based on UCLA 3 items: (How often do you feel that you lack companionship / left out / isolated from others?). Includes persons age 60 or older who reported “some of the time” or “often” to any of the three questions.
- X. **“1 in 3 local providers has a waitlist with seniors waiting on average 4 months for vital meals”** data points are from the Meals on Wheels America 2025 Member Benchmarking Survey, conducted by Meals on Wheels America.
- Y. **“Gas prices increased 53% from 2015 to 2025”** is from U.S. Bureau of Labor

Statistics time series data. Series Title: Gasoline, unleaded regular, per gallon/3.785 liters in U.S. city average, average price, not seasonally adjusted, U.S. city average. Calculations from March 2015 to March 2025. Available at:  
<https://data.bls.gov/timeseries/APU000074714>

- Z.** **“Grocery prices increased 30% from 2014 to 2024”** is from Sweitzer, M., U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, Food-away-from-home price growth outpaced food at home and overall inflation over past decade. Available at:  
<https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/charts-of-note/chart-detail?chartId=109406>

**HELP US END THE WAIT. FUND AND SUPPORT MEALS ON WHEELS.**