



FACT SHEET SOURCES & METHODS

WHAT WE DELIVER: 2026 NATIONAL SNAPSHOT

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.

The Meals on Wheels solution starts with the meal...

- A. **“244 million meals served annually” and “2.6 million seniors served annually (OAA)”** are from Administration for Community Living Aging, Independence, and Disability (AGID) Data Portal Data Explorer. Filters: Data Set: State Performance Reports (SPR) (Title III); Years: 2024; Geography: all U.S. Totals, 50 States + DC & Territories; Data Elements: Older Adults Persons and Units --> Total Persons by Service --> Congregate Meals and Home Delivered Meals, Older Adults Persons and Units -->Total Service Units and Total Persons Served by Service --> Congregate Meals and Home Delivered Meals. Data available at: <https://agid.acl.gov/data-explorer> Accessed 10/14/2025.
- B. **“Meal services providers offer”** data points are from the Meals on Wheels America 2025 Member Benchmarking Survey, conducted by Meals on Wheels America.

and delivers on so much more.

- C. **“Services provided”** data points are from the Meals on Wheels America 2025 Member Benchmarking Survey, conducted by Meals on Wheels America.
- D. **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 Americas 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 includes 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.
- 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 x 23.98 = \$3.28
 - Home-delivered meal: 180,685,931 meals served / 237,695,352 total meals = 76.02%. \$14.16 x 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 x 250 service days = \$3,511.22 per year

E. **"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/>. \$3,132 per day.

F. **"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>

G. **"Of home-delivered meal 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 Home-delivered meals funded through Title III of the OAA. Data obtained through special request from ACL.

But significant challenges mean millions of seniors are waiting.

- H. **“Nearly all Meals on Wheels providers report making impossible choices due to funding challenges...”** data points are from the Meals on Wheels America 2025 Member Benchmarking Survey, conducted by Meals on Wheels America.
- I. **“Nearly all programs report one or more challenges to serving home-delivered meals to all seniors in their community”** data points are from the Meals on Wheels America 2025 Member Benchmarking Survey, conducted by Meals on Wheels America.
- J. **“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.

Meals on Wheels providers are waiting too. Nearly all providers are ready and willing to end the wait... with more resources.

- K. **“97% of local programs believe there are seniors in their community who need meals who they are not currently serving”** is from the Meals on Wheels America 2021 Comprehensive Network Survey conducted by Trailblazer Research. Figure includes respondents that said they were serving fewer than “all” seniors in their market who need nutrition services (includes programs that were serving “some,” “many” or “most” seniors). (N=478). Report summary available at: <https://www.mealsonwheelsamerica.org/learn-more/research/member-perspectives-practices-survey>
- L. **“61% are confident that they could serve more seniors, if the new clients came with more funding”** is from the Meals on Wheels America 2025 Member Benchmarking survey conducted by Meals on Wheels America. Figure includes programs that selected “5”, “6” or “7 – Extremely easy” in response to the question “How easy would it be to start serving home-delivered meals to 10% more clients in the next 60-90 days, assuming they came with meal funding?”

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