Ready for America's Action

The Crisis of Waitlists for Meals on Wheels



Imagine waiting months — even years — for nutritious meals and moments of connection. That's the heartbreaking reality for too many older adults across the country. As America's senior population grows, the need is outpacing the capacity of local Meals on Wheels providers — and the result is a national crisis of waitlists. Providers are working tirelessly to stretch limited resources and serve more seniors, but they can't do it alone. Without sustainable funding, the wait will only grow longer.

TOGETHER, WE CAN END THE WAIT®

> **It's the worst feeling to have to tell someone, 'We have a waitlist.' You can't speak those words without feeling emotion because you're telling someone who's starving.**
>
> — Meals on Wheels provider

1 in 3 providers has a waitlist for home-delivered meals.

Nearly 48,000 seniors are waiting — enough people to fill Yankee Stadium.

The average waitlist is 157 seniors, **some exceed 3,600.**

The average wait is more than 4 months. **Some wait more than 2 years.**

1 in 3 providers have a waitlist for another service, most frequently for congregate meals, transportation and home modification

The challenge of addressing waitlists is complex, and can vary not only by provider but also region. **Nearly 2/3 of providers with waitlists serve rural areas.**

Waitlists are largest in: **TX, NC, TN, FL, SC, and CA.** Most of these states also experience heightened rates of senior food insecurity.

Unfortunately, some providers have **stopped adding seniors to their waitlists** because of the already overwhelming demand. Tragically, some seniors pass away or move into nursing homes before ever receiving services.

Last updated: September 2026.

MEALS ON WHEELS AMERICA

END the WAIT®



What Is Causing the Waitlist Crisis?

#1 REASON: FUNDING SHORTFALLS

Federal funding has not kept pace with the growing senior population.

Private dollars **are shrinking**.

Food, fuel, labor and utility **costs are rising.**

PROVIDERS ALSO FACE ...

Staffing and volunteer **shortages.**

Outdated or maxed-out kitchens and delivery equipment.

The number of providers with waitlists may soon increase by nearly a third due to lack of resources.

What It Takes to End the Wait

PROVIDERS NEED...

- **Sustainable funding** to invest in infrastructure and expand capacity to meet rising demand.
- **Additional volunteers** to deliver meals and moments of connection
- **More staff** capacity to expand services
- **Top challenges** to serving meals to all seniors in the community that need them: **funding to pay for the meals, funding uncertainty and food prices**

With the right funding, Meals on Wheels providers can show up for older adults in every corner of the country to deliver nutritious meals and moments of connection. Every dollar moves us closer to a future where no senior has to wait for the support they deserve.

Together, We Can Deliver®

Learn more at mealsonwheelsamerica.org/waitlists.

Information data sources available at mealsonwheelsamerica.org/facts.

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