



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 with a rapidly growing population over the age of 60, programs funded by the OAA need funding that reflects the demand. Notably, 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. Today, local Meals on Wheels programs report still serving more home-delivered meal clients than before the pandemic, with 7 out of 10 programs facing higher demand for home-delivered meals than before the pandemic.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, the FY 2024 appropriations bill included a decrease of \$8 million (.8%) for the OAA Title III-C Nutrition Program, for a total of \$1,058,684,000. Despite serving 2.2 million older adults home-delivered and congregate meals annually², there are still older adults in need of OAA nutrition services.³ Federal funding cuts enacted in the FY 2024 bills paired with a rapidly increasing senior population, increased operational costs, and existing waiting lists forcing seniors to wait on average 3 long months for services intensify an already dangerous funding issue while local programs are forced to serve more seniors in need with less funds. We urge Congress to do more and **increase funding for the program by \$783 million to a total of \$1,841,753,000 (\$1.842 billion) in FY 2025.**

MEALS ON WHEELS AMERICA 2024 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. Reauthorize and strengthen the Older Americans Act (OAA).

- Protect the OAA's core purposes of reducing hunger, social isolation and loneliness, and improving older adult health and well-being.
- Increase authorized funding levels for all OAA programs and establish incentives and funding for enhanced nutrition services (e.g., medically tailored or culturally appropriate meals).
- Unify Title III-C to improve efficiency and enable local providers to more easily tailored services to seniors' needs.
- Prioritize community-based organizations for nutrition services contracts and improve the reimbursement and payment processes.
- Modernize the OAA to incorporate innovations, flexibility and successful practices leveraged during the pandemic.

2. Increase funding and support for senior nutrition programs.

- Provide \$1.842 billion for OAA nutrition programs in FY 2025 to address increased demand for meals and rising operational costs.
- 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 capacity for nonprofits, including passing the *Charitable Act (H.R. 3435, S. 566)* and *Volunteer Driver Tax Appreciation Act (H.R. 3032, S, 2020)*.

3. Expand nutrition access and social connection for older adults.

- Reauthorize and protect the nutrition programs in the Farm Bill, as well as improve access and support for older adults by including the *Senior Hunger Prevention Act (H.R. 3474, S. 1036)*.
- Advance Food as Medicine Interventions such as establishing home-delivered meals provided by community-based providers as a fully reimbursable benefit through fee-for-service Medicare, Medicare Advantage and Medicaid and passing the *Medically Tailored Home-Delivered Meals Demonstration Act (H.R. 6780, S. 2133)*.
- Address the epidemic of social isolation and loneliness declared by the U.S. Surgeon General through nationally coordinated awareness, initiatives and research, as proposed by the *National Strategy for Social Connection Act (S. 2350)* and *Improving Measurements for Loneliness and Isolation Act (H.R. 6284, S. 3260)*.

QUICK FACTS

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

- In 2022, one in six (17%) of older adults was threatened by or experienced hunger (i.e., were *marginally food insecure*) in the United States, and 8.7% were *food insecure* or *very low food secure*.⁴
- In 2022, Black and Hispanic seniors experienced hunger at higher rates than those who are white: Black/African American seniors' risk of food insecurity was over two 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.⁵
- In 2021, over 18 million (24.2%) seniors lived alone, and nearly one in three (31%) seniors felt lonely in 2018.⁶
- In 2021, nearly 2.4 million older adults received congregate or home-delivered meals through OAA Title III.⁷
- In 2021, the Meals on Wheels network delivered more than 51 million OAA Title III meals.

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 saves 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 costly. **It's estimated that older adult falls cost our nation \$50 billion in medical expenses annually,⁸ and the economic burden associated with older adult malnutrition is \$51 billion annually.⁹**

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:¹⁰

	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. Most 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 national profile of older adults who may be eligible to receive meal services reveals several factors that put them at greater risk of hunger, isolation and/or loneliness:¹¹

- 23.7% are 60+
- 54.1% are women
- 10.4% are Black or African American
- 9.9% are Hispanic or Latino
- .09% are American Indian or Native Alaskan
- 0.2% are Asian, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- 24.2% live alone
- 12% are veterans
- 24.1% live in rural areas
- 24.5% self-report fair or poor health
- 29.4% have a disability
- 63% self-report 3+ medical conditions

In *The Case for Meals on Wheels: An Evidence-Based Solution to Senior Hunger and Isolation*, our research review of 38 studies conducted between 1996 and 2023, receiving Meals on Wheels is shown to reduce health care utilization and cost, prevent nursing home admissions, increase food security, improve diet quality, reduce social isolation, reduce falls and increase home safety. Thus, growing wait lists due to lack of funding inhibit improving the well-being of older adults who can greatly benefit from Meals on Wheels programs.¹²

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.¹³

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. Seven out of ten Meals on Wheels programs are facing higher demand for home-delivered meals than prior to the pandemic, with 1 in 4 serving 50% more than before the pandemic.¹ In 2022, one in six older adults was threatened by or experienced hunger. There are 2.5 million (2,542,572) low-income older adults who are food insecure and not currently receiving meals, who would likely need them.¹⁴ Nearly all (99%) nutrition programs are facing one or more challenges to serve meals to all eligible seniors in their community.¹⁵ Over half of members report challenges with food prices, funding to pay for meals, and recruiting and retaining volunteers.¹ One in three Meals on Wheels programs recently reported keeping a waitlist, with seniors waiting an average of 90 days for vital meals and supportive services.¹⁶

In a 2023 Meals on Wheels America member survey, 78% of programs report that they have already or will need to add seniors to a waitlist due to a lack of funding. Nearly all (99%) Meals on Wheels programs identify one or more significant challenges to serving meals to all seniors in need in their community. The challenges that programs most frequently noted include food prices (75%), funding to pay for meals (65%), difficulty recruiting and retaining enough volunteers (59%), and gas prices (59%). Increased funding for the OAA Nutrition Program is urgently needed to ensure that community-based providers can deliver proven, life-sustaining nutrition and social connection services to the 2.5 million seniors in need who are currently not served.

12 million older adults aged 60 and older worry about having enough food —up from 10 million in 2022¹⁷. Older adults are at a high risk for malnutrition due to decreased appetite, mobility issues, prescription medications and more.¹⁸

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.¹⁹ However, the majority (64%) are confident that they could serve more individuals, if the new clients came with more funding.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES & CONTACT INFORMATION

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

¹ June 2023 Meals on Wheels America member feedback survey, conducted by WRMA.

² ACL, 2022, Table 1. *Persons Served Under OAA Title III - Estimated Unduplicated Count* (Clusters 1-3) (.xlsx / 15 KB), https://agid.acl.gov/FILES/National_Tables_FFY_2021/Table_1_FFY_2021.xlsx

³ Larin, K. A. (2024, May 17). *Older Americans Act: Updated Information on Unmet Need for Services*. Government Accountability Office. <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-24-106767.pdf>

⁴ Meals on Wheels America analysis of data from the *2022 Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement*, data obtained from U.S. Census Bureau custom tables at <https://data.census.gov/mdat/#/>

⁵ Meals on Wheels America analysis of data from the *2022 Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement*, data obtained from U.S. Census Bureau custom tables at <https://data.census.gov/mdat/#/>

⁶ "Seniors living alone" [#] and [%] figures are from the 2021 Administration for Community Living (ACL) American Community Survey (ACS) Demographic and Household Data, 1-Year Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS). Data reflects the number of seniors living alone in the state or nation (50 states+ DC) in 2021 who are age 60 and older. Data available in the ACL Aging, Independence, and Disability Program Data Portal (AGID), American Community Survey (ACS) Demographic and Household Data. Release date 3/6/2023: <https://agid.acl.gov/release.html>

⁷ Meals on Wheels America, 2022, Sources & Methods: Older Americans Act Nutrition Program Fact Sheet United States 2021. https://www.mealsonwheelsamerica.org/docs/default-source/fact-sheets/2021/2021-national/oaafactsheet_sourcesandmethods_february2022_mowa.pdf?sfvrsn=49a1b23b_2

⁸ 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>

⁹ 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>

¹⁰ ACL, 2023, *National Survey of OAA Participants 2022*, available on ACL's Aging, Independence, and Disability (AGID) Program Data Portal, <https://agid.acl.gov/>

¹¹ Meals on Wheels America, 2024 *America's Aging Population: By the Numbers*.

https://www.mealsonwheelsamerica.org/docs/default-source/fact-sheets/2024/us-fact-sheet_final_updated-february-2024.pdf

¹² 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>

¹³ 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

¹⁴ U.S. Census Bureau (2022), *Current Population Survey (CPS) Food Security Supplement*, Meals on Wheels America calculation of dataset available at: https://www.census.gov/data/datasets/timeseries/demo/cps/cpsupp_cps-repwgt/cps-food-security.html

¹⁵ Office, U. S. G. A. (n.d.). *Older Americans Act: Updated information on unmet need for services*. Older Americans Act: Updated Information on Unmet Need for Services | U.S. GAO. <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-24-107513>

¹⁶ Meals on Wheels America (November 2023), #SaveLunch Member Pulse Survey. Internal report

¹⁷ U.S. Census Bureau (2022), *Current Population Survey (CPS) Food Security Supplement*, Meals on Wheels America calculation of dataset available at: https://www.census.gov/data/datasets/timeseries/demo/cps/cpsupp_cps-repwgt/cps-food-security.html

¹⁸ The Gerontological Society of America; National Academy on an Aging Society. Profiles of an Aging Society: What We Know and Can Do About Malnutrition. Washington, DC: The Gerontological Society of America; Fall 2015

¹⁹ Meals on Wheels America, 2021, *Comprehensive Network Survey*, conducted by Trailblazer Research, <https://www.mealsonwheelsamerica.org/learn-more/research/member-perspectives-practices-survey>