



**OUR STRATEGIC
PLAN** *to*

END *the* **WAIT**™



**MEALS on WHEELS
AMERICA**



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MEALS **on** WHEELS

A LETTER FROM ELLIE HOLLANDER, PRESIDENT AND CEO

In 2024, Meals on Wheels America celebrates our 50th anniversary. It provides a moment to honor our past and look with excitement to our future. For five decades, Meals on Wheels America has leveraged its national programming, partnerships and influence to enhance the capacities of community-based Meals on Wheels organizations, expanding nutrition and socialization services for individuals in greatest need, driving positive change across policies and practices and mobilizing resources to build resiliency and sustainability.

And we've seen our efforts work. Nationwide, we've warded off threats to federal funding, raised millions of dollars to deliver meals and friendly visits to older adults, and created a rich and growing research base that proves the health and economic benefits of Meals on Wheels. We've leveraged national partnerships to drive awareness and engage celebrities and policymakers to champion older adults' health and wellbeing, and have been a tireless voice for local organizations in a way that has truly lifted all boats.

Despite our relentless efforts, local Meals on Wheels programs are struggling to address the sheer volume of need. Federal funding has not kept pace with either the growing senior population or rising costs. And particularly since the pandemic, funding from state, local and private sources has failed to keep up with demand, forcing organizations to stretch their resources further and serve fewer older adults.

Our seniors can't wait any longer. Now is the time to make their needs a top priority in our country. Our local Meals on Wheels organizations serve virtually every single community across the country, and they're eager to do even more...but they desperately need more resources to do so.

That's why, in honor of our 50th anniversary, **Meals on Wheels America has launched a bold strategy** that will allow the Meals on Wheels network to collectively expand its reach and improve more seniors' lives. Over the next five years, we will continue to be an innovator, thought leader and knowledge-generator. We will build alliances and work intensively with government, coalitions, partners and researchers to identify policies and interventions that positively impact our network and the seniors it serves. We will pursue high-impact partnerships and work to build a movement of champions who make seniors their top cause and Meals on Wheels their top charity.

Older adults have contributed so much to our lives, and they deserve a reciprocal level of support, respect and dignity. Our new direction will center the needs of our network, allowing seniors who are stuck in limbo to access life-saving services from their community-based Meals on Wheels organizations.

Together, we can create a more secure, healthier future for us all. **Together**, we can serve more and serve better. **Together, we can end the wait.**

Gratefully,



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ellie Hollander".

Ellie Hollander
President and CEO
Meals on Wheels America

WE FACE EXTRAORDINARY CHALLENGES, BUT THERE ARE IMMENSE OPPORTUNITIES

In our fast-moving world of economic uncertainty, political turmoil, increased disasters and so much more, urgent issues confront us on many levels. And yet, there is a silent humanitarian crisis affecting so many people in our community. It deserves attention but, instead, is mounting behind closed doors.

For far too long the pressing needs of seniors have been underfunded and ignored, leaving millions waiting for nutritious meals and moments of connection. Waiting for America to care. Meals on Wheels has been the most effective solution to senior hunger and isolation for more than 50 years; nevertheless, we're waiting too. Waiting for more government funding, donations and volunteers.

The enormity of these challenges makes it easy to see a world of unsolvable problems. But Meals on Wheels America sees countless opportunities to transform how our organization, network and country work together to champion senior health and wellbeing. To eliminate waitlists and ensure every senior who needs Meals on Wheels gets it.



SENIORS ARE WAITING FOR AMERICA TO CARE

- 12M seniors face food insecurity¹
- 31% of seniors feel lonely²
- 1 in 3 Meals on Wheels organizations has a waitlist³
- Only 1% of philanthropic donations in the U.S. go towards senior causes⁴
- Federal funding only covers 37% of the cost to serve more than 2 million seniors Meals on Wheels annually⁵
- Volunteerism is at its lowest in nearly two decades⁶

MEALS ON WHEELS CAN HELP IMPROVE SENIORS' HEALTH AND WELLBEING

- Meals on Wheels provides support at the intersection of hunger, malnutrition and social isolation
- Meals on Wheels programs already operate in nearly every community
- 64% of local programs are confident they could serve more seniors with more funding⁷

WHEN WE ALLOW THIS NEED TO GO SO CHRONICALLY UNDERFUNDED, WE ALL PAY THE COST AND OUR SENIORS ARE LEFT WAITING.

Here's what some of our local organizations had to say:

“We have an extensive waitlist for Meals on Wheels clients due to the need of our community being greater than our budget. Several of the individuals on our waitlist have passed away while awaiting services.”

“Our Meals on Wheels program operates in a huge, rural, isolated area. Older adults are scattered across...almost 600 square miles... Gas in our community is a whopping \$5.39 per gallon! Insurance for a delivery vehicle is over \$4,000 a year. The cost of food has never been higher.”

“We are currently unable to release any waitlisted clients. Some have been on the waitlist for years.”

“The demand for Meals on Wheels is unprecedented in our region. We added 252 people to our waitlist within the past 90 days... We do not have enough freezer space. Food prices have drastically affected our cost per unit.”



WHO WE ARE

Meals on Wheels America is the leadership organization supporting the more than 5,000 community-based organizations across the country that are dedicated to addressing senior hunger and isolation. Powered by a trusted volunteer workforce, this network delivers a comprehensive solution that begins with a meal and is proven to enable independence and wellbeing through the additional benefits of tailored nutrition, social connection, safety and much more. By providing funding, programming, education, research and advocacy, Meals on Wheels America empowers local organizations to strengthen their communities, one senior at a time.

OUR VISION

An America in which all seniors live nourished lives with independence and dignity.

OUR VISION

To empower local community programs to improve the health and quality of life of the seniors they serve so that no one is left hungry or isolated.

OUR BELIEFS

- **All seniors should age with dignity and respect**
- **Aging in place is a superior option for most seniors**
- **Meeting the holistic needs of older adults starts with the meal**
- **Together, We Can Deliver™**

OUR COMMITMENTS

- **Delivering appropriate meals to serve seniors more effectively**
- **Understanding each community well enough to meet its seniors' distinct needs**
- **Identifying and addressing unmet need(s)**
- **Leveraging our trusted relationship to keep seniors healthy, safe and connected**
- **Collaborating at all levels to ensure no senior is forgotten**



WITH INCREASED SUPPORT, WE CAN SERVE MORE SENIORS LIKE MARY LOU

Congestive heart failure landed Mary Lou in the ICU, where she caught COVID-19. "When I came out of there, I was on oxygen. I was in a wheelchair and weak as a kitten." Once her family's cook, she then struggled to even stand, much less prepare her own meals. Mary Lou had to wait on others to feed her, and that's where United Way Meals on Wheels in Birmingham could help. They ended her wait by delivering nutritious meals and providing essential companionship. "I have the sweetest people that bring my meals," she said. "I call them my angels."

OUR OUTCOMES FOR OLDER AMERICANS

Through our programming, partnerships and influence, we will work towards two connected and reinforcing outcomes: serve more and serve better.

SERVE MORE

By enacting a holistic set of strategies, we can meet the growing unmet need among older adults, particularly older adults with multiple chronic conditions and those living in rural communities and communities of color.

SERVE BETTER

By driving capacity-building and partnership at multiple levels, we can extend local organizations' ability to deliver tailored nutrition and enhanced social connection services that continue to differentiate Meals on Wheels and deliver meaningful impact.

Our plan to End the Wait moves us closer to the reality we aspire to—one where all seniors have access to the nutritious meals, moments of connection and other life-saving services they need to live nourished lives with independence and dignity.



SERVE MORE: EXPANDING OUR REACH THROUGH A STRONG, SUPPORTED NETWORK



The Problem

Today, 12 million seniors worry about having enough food¹ and 1 in 3 feel lonely, a declared epidemic.² And the number of seniors is rapidly increasing, creating enormous challenges for the community-based organizations that serve this population. Many of these challenges were exacerbated by the pandemic, undermining years of progress and negatively affecting seniors in hard-to-reach places.

Without urgent action at scale, it is expected that 14 million seniors—4.1% of the total U.S. population—will be food insecure by 2030,⁷ with older adults in communities of color feeling the greatest impact.⁸

Our Solution

Eliminate waitlists and ensure every senior who needs Meals on Wheels gets it by increasing funding and resources. These efforts will give special focus to serving older adults with multiple chronic conditions, in rural communities and in communities of color.

We'll continue to leverage our reimagined MORE (Member Offers, Rewards and Expertise) Program to help local organizations reduce operational costs and increase efficiency through discounted pricing and trusted guidance on the products and services they use most. Through our partnerships with selected providers, we will leverage the aggregated buying power of the nationwide Meals on Wheels network so we can pass benefits and savings to individual programs.

KEY INITIATIVES

- Incentivize innovative community-specific solutions through targeted grant opportunities
- Develop, promote and scale successful collaborations for Meals on Wheels organizations to fill gaps in service
- Lower local program operating costs by leveraging the network's collective buying power

Build organizations' capacity to serve more older adults through infrastructure investments, volunteer recruitment and retention, and staff training to help meet the growing demand.

KEY INITIATIVES

- Foster growth, innovation and sustainability through the development of a Center for Best Practices that includes information and resources on service delivery, policy and advocacy, research and evaluation, and collaboration
- Enhance business acumen through tailored technical support in key domains, such as leadership, infrastructure, operations, data and systems, community engagement, nutrition and social connection
- Bolster sustainability by improving local delivery and kitchen infrastructure



Expand and foster collaborative efforts to serve previously unserved or underserved seniors, ensuring equitable access to Meals on Wheels services for all older adults in need.

We'll build a robust coalition of support by expanding partnerships with organizations like the National Association of Nutrition and Aging Services Programs (NANASP). Meals on Wheels America and NANASP will continue leveraging our combined influence on Capitol Hill, providing collective insights to decision makers in Congress while advocating for the protection and funding of the Older Americans Act.

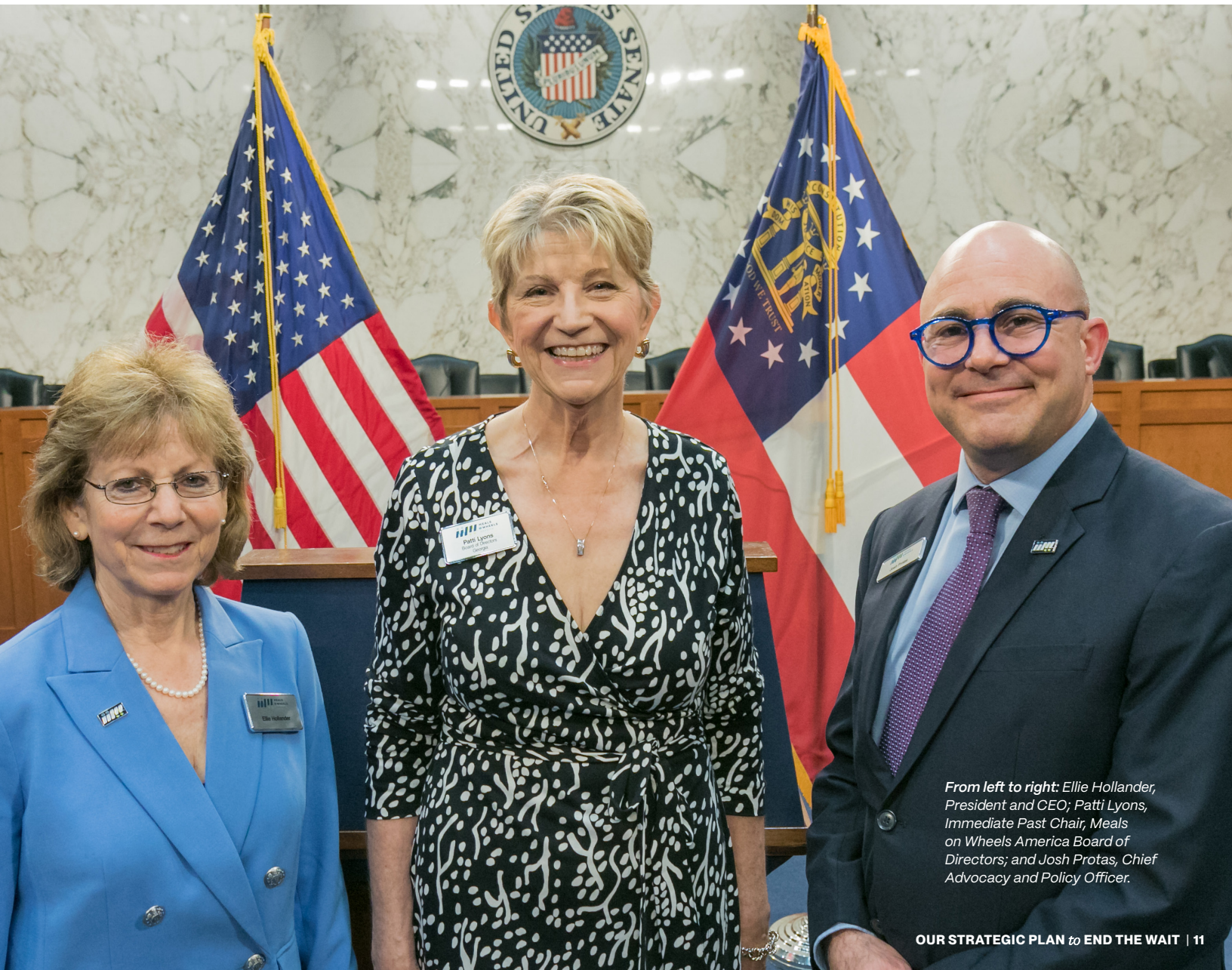
KEY INITIATIVES

- Enhance inclusion and strategic alignment through a formal advisory group structure that reflects the diversity of the network and informs Meals on Wheels America in its strategies related to data, volunteerism and health care
- Support collaborative efforts focused on advocacy and shared services through existing Meals on Wheels state associations
- Build national partnerships that drive awareness and action around advocacy, while bolstering programming and impact at state and local levels in priority communities

Influence Congress and offer policy solutions that increase Meals on Wheels' federal and state funding and protect the Older Americans Act (OAA)—the primary legislation that addresses senior hunger and isolation and supports the Meals on Wheels network.

KEY INITIATIVES

- Protect the OAA through increased federal advocacy efforts, leveraging national coalitions, partnerships and our unique influence on Capitol Hill
- Put pressure on Congress to adequately fund Meals on Wheels by raising our collective voice of grassroots advocates, including local Meals on Wheels organizations, donors and supporters
- Grow advocacy in key states to drive increased public resources and legislative support in priority communities



From left to right: Ellie Hollander, President and CEO; Patti Lyons, Immediate Past Chair, Meals on Wheels America Board of Directors; and Josh Protas, Chief Advocacy and Policy Officer.



WE CAN END THE WAIT FOR SENIORS LIKE CARL

After losing his driver's license and being hospitalized twice—once for a cardiac problem and once again for pneumonia—Carl was having trouble caring for himself. When a hospital case manager noticed he wasn't getting proper nutrition, she referred him to Meals on Wheels. His local program sprang into action and began providing him with meals and companionship. "There are people out there who do care about the needy and homebound," he said.

SERVE BETTER: DEEPENING IMPACT THROUGH TAILORED NUTRITION AND SOCIAL CONNECTION



The Problem

For older adults, good nutrition is perhaps the most fundamental cornerstone of a healthy life, yet many factors make them vulnerable to malnutrition. The ability to afford or shop for food, prepare a meal or even open a can—whether due to economic, transportation, physical or mental challenges—may be too difficult. Plus, most seniors (95%) have at least one chronic health condition, such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes or arthritis, and nearly 80% have two or more.⁹ And many suffer from loneliness and social isolation, declared a national epidemic in 2023 by the U.S. Surgeon General.

Nutritious meals and social connection provided by Meals on Wheels improves health and wellbeing, helps manage chronic conditions and enables independence at home.

Our Solution

Enhance the network's nutritional and culinary expertise to meet older adults' complex nutritional needs and take Meals on Wheels' value to new heights by developing shared services/resources and technical assistance programming. This benefits the full network, but especially organizations not yet offering meals that are medically tailored for the seniors they serve.

KEY INITIATIVES

- Provide shared nutrition services by launching a network of regional registered dietitians who can provide targeted training and support, both virtually and in-person
- Innovate menu planning and meal offerings by collecting and sharing client informed research and resources through the Center for Best Practices
- Ensure high quality, locally led medically and culturally tailored meal preparation, packaging and delivery through high touch technical assistance

Enable the Meals on Wheels network to deliver more social connection services through national partnerships, thought leadership and capacity building support.

KEY INITIATIVES

- Increase participation in local social connection offerings through engaging marketing materials that leverage behavioral science to make program offerings more appealing
- Build the next generation of Meals on Wheels volunteers and champions who deliver social connection services by piloting and scaling partnerships with national volunteer programs and developing robust corporate volunteer engagement offerings
- Promote the connection between Meals on Wheels services and a reduction in seniors' feelings of loneliness through marketing, thought leadership, advocacy and partnerships such as the Coalition to End Social Isolation and Loneliness

An example of an existing social connection offering is Meals on Wheels Loves Pets, a national program that helps many of our local organizations deliver pet services and support, keeping homebound seniors and their furry companions together. Since the program's inception, Meals on Wheels America and its partners have helped more than 41,000 Meals on Wheels clients and their pets remain at home and together through the delivery of pet meals, veterinary care and other supportive services.



Strengthen our evidence base and demonstrate the impact of Meals on Wheels while guiding continuous improvements. We'll collaborate with local organizations, health care providers and research institutions to build a robust repository of data and information.

KEY INITIATIVES

- Showcase the positive health outcomes of our network's services by building an up-to-date, consistent and aggregated set of data on local organizations and older adults served
- Develop a systematic review and methodology on the effectiveness and impact of Meals on Wheels against specific outcomes through a multitude of externally conducted studies
- Raise awareness of the value that Meals on Wheels offers related to nutrition, social connection and health by disseminating published papers, presentations and evidence summaries

Position Meals on Wheels as a solution for the health care industry and help our local network earn revenue, deliver a valuable service and ultimately improve seniors' lives.

Since its founding, Meals on Wheels has touched the lives of millions of seniors, providing them with the nutrition and human contact they need. But the benefits of this care and compassion go far beyond, driving notable improvements to the health care industry's bottom line. Meals on Wheels Health works with health care providers and payers to identify risks before they become problems, address problems before they become health issues, and solve health issues before they become catastrophic and costly. In fact, Meals on Wheels can serve a senior for an entire year for about the same cost as just one day in a hospital or 10 days in a nursing home.

KEY INITIATIVES

- Enhance ease of implementation for local organizations operating health care contracts by providing a robust set of tools, resources and knowledge
- Influence key opinion leaders and decision makers in health care and the "Food is Medicine" movement by bolstering our health policy expertise and educational efforts
- Build the infrastructure that allows Meals on Wheels Health to expand into new markets



WHAT WE NEED TO END THE WAIT

DATA AND TECHNOLOGY

Underpinning all challenges and opportunities described above are data and technology. Meals on Wheels America is in the process of upgrading its own systems while harnessing the power of data analysis within the network to unlock insights and identify opportunities for growth and mission impact. We are on a path to becoming the leading producer, consumer and broker of this data – helping our organization and network to better understand and address complex, interconnected challenges facing older adults. This will include a steady and heightened emphasis on measurement and evaluation.

INCREASED FUNDING

Meals on Wheels, and aging issues at large, continue to go chronically underfunded. This lack of support has led to dire consequences for older adults' health and wellbeing, and we can no longer wait.

To serve more and serve better, local Meals on Wheels organizations will require increased financial resources. Meals on Wheels America will work to drive revenue to its network through an integrated and comprehensive approach that includes:

- **Private Philanthropy** – by offering discreet, strategic philanthropic opportunities, we can raise funds from individuals and institutions seeking to make a measurable impact
- **Mass-Market Fundraising** – through storytelling, awareness raising and brand visibility, we can make the case for everyday donors to come together and support Meals on Wheels

- **Corporate Partnerships** – through multi-year, multi-faceted alliances with dedicated corporations, we can help generate both revenue and volunteer support for our network of local organizations
- **Federal and State Funding** – by protecting and enhancing the Older Americans Act, advocating for increased funding for senior nutrition organizations, and expanding nutrition access and social connection for older adults, we can strengthen the social safety net of public support
- **Innovation and Earned Income** – by seeding and scaling innovative efforts, we can help lessen dependence on traditional philanthropy and build sustainability for the years to come

YOUR SUPPORT

Achieving our vision of an America in which all seniors live nourished lives with independence and dignity cannot be done alone. Local Meals on Wheels organizations across the country are willing and wanting to generate more impact but lack the support needed to meet the ever-increasing demand. At Meals on Wheels America, we have the right team and the right strategy in place, fueled by a culture of innovation and creativity that will extend our unique value proposition for years to come. The possibilities are limitless when we work together.

Join us and help End the Wait.

www.MealsOnWheelsAmerica.org/OurPlan



MEALS on WHEELS



¹ Meals on Wheels America's analysis of data from 2022 Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement

² Meals on Wheels America's analysis of data obtained by request from AARP, Loneliness and Social Connections: A National Survey of Adults 45 and Older, 2018

³ Meals on Wheels America 2024 Member Benchmarking Survey, conducted by Meals on Wheels America

⁴ Candid, US Social Sector, 2019

⁵ Meals on Wheel America's calculations from ACL data on total expenditures and OAA funding

⁶ AmeriCorps, Spotlighting the CEV Series: Formal Volunteering and Informal Helping in America, 2022.

⁷ Meals on Wheels America's analysis of US Census Bureau, Population Division and the December 2022 Current Population Food Security Supplement

⁸ Meals on Wheels America's analysis of data from 2022 Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement

⁹ National Council on Aging. Chronic Inequities: Measuring Disease Cost Burden Among Older Adults in the U.S. A Health and Retirement Study Analysis



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