

# Reinforce Nutrition Services for Homebound Seniors

## Protect the Accessibility of Older Americans Act Nutrition Programs

### Core Member Organizations

- Aging and Disability Professionals Association of Wisconsin (ADPAW)
- Alzheimer’s Association Wisconsin Chapter
- Wisconsin Adult Day Services Association (WADSA)
- Wisconsin Association of Area Agencies on Aging (W4A)
- Wisconsin Association of Benefit Specialists (WABS)
- Wisconsin Association of Nutrition Directors (WAND)
- Wisconsin Association of Senior Centers (WASC)
- Wisconsin Institute for Healthy Aging (WIHA)
- Wisconsin Senior Advocates
- Wisconsin Senior Corps Association (WISCA)
- Wisconsin Tribal Aging Unit Association

The Wisconsin Aging Advocacy Network (WAAN) is a collaboration of organizations and individuals working with and for Wisconsin’s older adults to shape public policy and improve the quality of life for older people. WAAN advocates for all older adults by educating the community and policy makers on particular issues impacting older adults; mobilizing people on priority issues; and advocating for change.

**WAAN State Issue Brief**  
 November 2022

**WAAN’s Position: Senior hunger and isolation are growing critical social issues effectively combated by Older Americans Act Senior Nutrition Programs. These programs need support and fiscal backing to maintain access to these crucial services for the growing aging population of Wisconsin.**

### Budget Request

- **Protect vulnerable older adults by increasing the state contribution to Home-Delivered Meal (HDM) Services from the current level of \$396,000 to \$5.95 million.** This increase would enable HDM programs across the state to meet rising needs. This also provides state funding for HDM services equal to the state funding for congregate nutrition services. Over their 50-year history, both programs have demonstrated positive impact on the health and well-being of the growing senior population.

The Older Americans Act (OAA) HDM program has proven to be an effective way to address the growing crisis of hunger and isolation among seniors. The program’s focus on nutritious food, social visits, safety checks and connection to other community services ensures that seniors receive the support they need to live more nourished and independent lives in their homes. The program saves taxpayer dollars by avoiding costly and preventable healthcare expenditures paid for through Medicaid, Medicare and/or personal resources. The state average cost to deliver a meal to a homebound senior is \$11.93,<sup>1</sup> comparatively the cost of one day in a nursing home is \$286.00 and the cost of one day in the hospital is \$2,558.00.<sup>2</sup>

When surveyed<sup>3</sup> about their satisfaction with the senior nutrition program, HDM recipients said:

- “Meals are delicious, more than enough, nice variety and very healthy. For all of us who can’t cook, thank you.”
- “Having someone check on me means a lot. The program helps me to stay in my apartment.”
- “I feel safe because my driver alerted police when I fell and waited until help arrived. There are some days when I have trouble moving around and it is hard to cook.”





Home-Delivered Meals have helped me because then I don't have to worry about cooking as I have shaky hands. I am also able to get a nutritious meal daily. The drivers are very nice and friendly, and I enjoy seeing them every day.

— Beverly, 89-year old  
Barron County resident

- “The meals are healthy, well balanced. The volunteers are always kind-hearted and nice to talk to when they deliver.”

The HDM survey data for 2021 for Wisconsin (n=6,259),<sup>3</sup> also indicates that for participants:

- Program meals make up half or more of their total daily food intake—69 percent
- Meal delivery provides:
  - Someone to talk to—47 percent
  - A sense of safety and security—45 percent
  - A link to get more support if needed—34 percent
  - Something to look forward to—66 percent

The HDM services provided by the Elderly Nutrition Programs support a vulnerable population of older adults. Many HDM participants live alone (62 percent), are homebound and express that at least some of the time they lack companionship (51 percent) and feel left out (42 percent) and isolated (44 percent).<sup>3</sup>

The ability to access these crucial services in a timely and consistent manner is key to the program's successful intervention to support the health and independence of older adults. **The program's accessibility is currently under threat statewide due to stagnant funding** (no increase in funding since program implementation in the mid-80's), **a growing aging population accompanied by unprecedented levels of demand, and increased expenses driven by inflation and a lack of resources.** The COVID-19 pandemic exposed critical levels of unmet need across the senior population in Wisconsin. This is evidenced by the fact that collectively program allocations are being depleted at twice the rate of the annual budget revenues (some programs have spent the total year's allocation at the six-month mark) coupled with an increase of over 200,000 meals (6 percent increase) served annually when compared to pre-pandemic operations.

The temporary operations flexibilities allowed during the public health emergency and the corresponding supplemental funding are currently propping up the operations of HDM services. Statewide, program leadership is preparing for widespread budget insufficiencies when these flexibilities and supplemental funding expire. According to the Wisconsin Association of Nutrition Directors, 82 percent of programs surveyed statewide anticipate a need to prioritize meal services, reduce meal services and/or institute waiting lists if funding remains stagnant.<sup>4</sup> **We urge the state legislature to protect this critical service for older adults by increasing the state contribution to the home delivered meals program.**



#### Contact WAAN

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1. Based on the 2022 average home-delivered meal cost submitted by 76% of the meal programs in Wisconsin
2. Wisconsin Fact Sheet. (2022, February). Facts & Resources. Retrieved November 1, 2022, from <https://www.mealsonwheelsamerica.org/learn-more/facts-resources>
3. 2021 WI Elder Nutrition Program Home Delivered Meal Satisfaction Survey
4. Wisconsin Association of Nutrition Directors 2022 Membership Nutrition Advocacy Survey