



**Testimony of Meals on Wheels Pennsylvania**  
to the  
**House Aging & Older Services Committee**  
February 26, 2024

Presented by  
Karen Wood  
LuAnn Oatman

Board of Directors  
Meals on Wheels Pennsylvania

<https://www.mealsonwheelspa.com/>

# An Overview: Meals on Wheels Programs in Pennsylvania

Provided by  
Feleen Nancarvis  
*Executive Director of Meals on Wheels of Lancaster*

## **Our History**

Throughout history, societies have formed ways to care for and support their community members. Meals on Wheels, as a concept, originated in England during World War II. The British Women's Voluntary Service (known today as the Royal Voluntary Service)<sup>1</sup> provided nearly all services pertaining to wartime life, including meals, to civilians who had been bombed out of their homes. In the second half of the century, the grassroots movement to provide home-delivered meals spread throughout the world. In the United States, the first program of its kind was founded by a settlement house, Lighthouse, in Philadelphia in 1954<sup>2</sup>. Directed by a social worker, Margaret Toy, the program, based on the English model, served one hot meal and a friendly visit to thirty recipients daily. Today, there are over 5,000 independent Meals on Wheels programs that operate nationwide. It is here in our very own home state of Pennsylvania that some of our member programs were founded prior to the establishment of the Older Americans Act in 1965 – one of our primary funding mechanisms today.

**Nationwide**, these Community Benefit Organizations serve as a lifeline to those who are challenged by food insecurity, loneliness, and various health complications, among other factors. Collectively, these programs serve more than 2.2 million seniors annually and deliver more than 251 million meals annually. These deliveries touch lives by fostering relationships, a social connection, and support the individuals served well beyond the meals provided. Over time, research has proven that nutritious home-delivered meals can

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<sup>1</sup> Royal Voluntary Service. "Our History". <https://www.royalvoluntaryservice.org.uk/about-us/our-history/>

<sup>2</sup> The Historical Society of Pennsylvania. "The Lighthouse Records". Collection 1970. Steven Smith. January 2004. [https://hsp.org/sites/default/files/legacy\\_files/migrated/findingaid1970lighthouse.pdf](https://hsp.org/sites/default/files/legacy_files/migrated/findingaid1970lighthouse.pdf)

reduce hospital readmissions and, thus, generate substantial cost savings within the health care system.<sup>3</sup>

**Our Members** vary widely in their scope, capacity, and locality. Within the Meals on Wheels Pennsylvania network alone, we are proud to host members consisting of a diverse group-- Area Agencies on Aging, senior centers, faith communities, medical centers, and others. Our services vary from program to program. Our members may offer case management services, home repair services, pet programming, grocery shopping assistance, transportation assistance, social visitation, wellness checks, and others. The meal services that we offer will vary as well—our members may provide frozen meals, breakfast items, snack packs, medically tailored meals, culturally appropriate menus, nonperishable goods, etc.

**Our Funding Sources** are as variable as our services. Consider for a moment, that the private pay contribution rate towards the cost of meals in 1967 was \$1.80 in Lancaster, PA. Today, accounting for inflation, the cost of those same meals would be equivalent to \$16.62. This is a testament both to the prohibitive cost of food to our recipients but also to prohibitive expenses to which some of our programs are beholden. The funding currently available to our programs is inadequate to supplement the true cost of providing the valuable services that we offer today. Many of these programs have limited the frequency in which private pay contribution rates are increased year over year, or forgone entirely, to offset the burden on recipients.

The funding that provides consistent fuel to our operations are the contracts that we hold with our local Area Agencies on Aging, Managed Care Organizations through the Community HealthChoices Program, and even resources like Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP). This is not an exhaustive list. It is imperative that these programs and resources are adequately funded so that our services, and our recipients, might continue to thrive.

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<sup>3</sup> Meals on Wheels America. "The Case for Meals on Wheels: An Evidence-Based Solution to Senior Hunger and Isolation". Sept 2023. <https://www.mealsonwheelsamerica.org/learn-more/research/the-case-for-meals-on-wheels-sept23>

As a network of Non-Profit Organizations, we rely heavily on volunteers, grants, financial contributions, and in-kind donations to subsidize the expenses associated with our operations. Without these gifts, the cost of providing these vital services would be reprehensible, inoperable, and, frankly, prohibitively unaffordable to the recipients themselves. It is our ambition to provide high quality life experience to our recipients over the demands of our bottom lines.

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**We graciously thank the Committee for your time, consideration, and the opportunity that you have provided us to share on behalf of our member programs.**

# A Testimony: Meals on Wheels Programs in Pennsylvania

Provided by  
Erik McGaughey  
*CEO of Meals on Wheels Greater Lehigh Valley*

## **Who We Are...**

Welcome to Meals on Wheels, where our legacy is built on a foundation of compassion, community, and dedicated service. It's not just about filling stomachs; it's about enhancing quality of life, empowering individuals to live independently, and enabling them to thrive in the comfort of their own homes.

**Our mission** is simple yet profound: to provide nourishing meals and essential support to those who need it most. We've become an integral part of the lives of over 2,000 seniors and adults with disabilities in the Lehigh Valley.

**Our services** reach various corners of our community. We've established 8 convenient pickup locations for our dedicated volunteers. These locations serve as hubs of generosity, where volunteers gather to contribute to our shared mission.

**Our commitment** to making a difference is reflected in the extensive reach of our operations. With a network of 89 daily delivery routes, we strive to bridge gaps and provide essential nourishment directly to the doorsteps of those we serve.

**Our volunteers** aren't just delivering food — they're delivering smiles and companionship. The human touch, the warmth of a friendly conversation, and the knowledge that someone cares can be as vital as the nutrients in the meals we provide.

**We are so much more than just a meal.** For many of those we serve, Meals on Wheels is the only person they might interact with on any given day. Those connections often feel

more like family than anything else because they connect and know about one another in so many interactions.

For many that we serve, they have chosen to add furry family members to their homes for companionship. We provide dry and wet food as well as litter at no cost to help them take care of their canine and feline friends.

We have a smoke detector installation program as well to help those who are staying in their homes to be safe from threats of fire.

As those we serve share their needs, we listen, we ask more questions and when we can we adapt and expand our efforts to make their independence possible.

**What we need...**

We need help in getting more funding for those in need. We need more support in helping people transition out of the overburdened health systems and onto our services. With this in mind, we have two aspirations: to diminish hospital readmission rates and expedite the recovery process within the comfort of our clients' homes. Specifically, we seek support in mitigating the delays experienced in enrolling clients into the Community HealthChoice's waiver program. These delays often lead to disruptions in care, including missed meals, particularly when clients shift from support provided by a local county-based Area Agency on Aging to a Managed Care Organization.

Protecting vulnerable members of our community should transcend politics and be recognized as a humanitarian issue. From a financial perspective, investing in nutritious meals is far more cost-effective than investing in prolonged hospitalizations or high frequency of readmissions rates. It is essential to convey to Managed Care Organizations that reducing reimbursement rates for our services is unsustainable. Our work is not driven by large profit margins but by the aspiration to create independent, high-quality lives.

We are so much more than just a meal. There are countless Meals on Wheels organizations throughout the country that offer a variety of programs to address the needs of pets, home repairs & safety measures, transportation & grocery assistance and so much more. We could use your help in educating constituents nationwide that we can be a source of support beyond meal delivery.

As we strive to connect with constituents who may qualify to receive these services, we are also seeking to engage with constituents across all generations through volunteerism. Cultivating a culture of volunteerism across all age groups is a vital cornerstone of our society. The fabric of what made families successful throughout the history of this country has changed. Creating companies, communities, and neighborhoods that reflect those same qualities is the very next best thing for those who don't have the disappearing family structure we once had. Incentivizing companies to make volunteering part of their culture will bond communities together. Healthier civic-minded companies who are rewarded for being part of the community as opposed to being a profit driven entity existing in a community is a big difference.

Overall, we strive to meet the needs of our community in as many ways as possible. Whether those needs pertain to home-delivered meals, a human connection, or so much more. We seek support in obtaining the appropriate funding streams to sustain, grow and enhance the work that we do. We seek the support to embolden our programs by reducing disruptions to services. Last but certainly not least, we seek support in raising awareness of the causes for which we are champions.

**Letter of Support**  
**Greene County, PA Blueprints Meals on Wheels Program**

I am forwarding this Letter of Support to Tiffany Huffman, regarding the valuable services of the *Meals on Wheels Program* for our County. My Aunt has been a recipient of this valued service for many years. It has brought her joy and lasting friendships. She looks forward to those delivering her lunch---just to see them and chat for a brief moment.

*The Meals on Wheels Program* is more than the title. It is a valuable resource connecting our Seniors to the community who otherwise would remain isolated. The delivery of quality nourishment is also one of caring, compassion, a kind word and a sincere and genuine greeting. The Seniors are now included within their community in which the majority of them have grown up. They know that someone cares. This, sadly, may be the only contact these individuals have; family and friends have passed on, moved from the area, or have lost communication with them along the way.

A mere few minutes for five days a week, the drivers bring a smile and arrive with a hot meal (that very well could be their only meal of the day) and a personal exchange of pleasantries; this is more valuable than anything that could be given to them. That is the nourishment that feeds the heart and feeds the body---making them work together. They matter.

Our Seniors have provided us a future and worked so very hard and sacrificed so very much. It is only right that they be seen, they be heard, they be valued. It is their turn to be served---by us. It is our responsibility to give back to them---because we want too. It is the right thing to do. Giving them a meal is such a small gesture, yet it impacts the quality of their lives.

The staff and all others involved in the *Meals on Wheels Program* shined during the COVID crisis. Everyone went beyond their job criteria to reach out. They called several times a week to make certain their Seniors were ok, if they needed anything---if they needed help. Drivers would bring emergency boxes of food when everything was "shut down" in the community, making our Seniors so much more isolated. Everyone involved within this program from the volunteers to those in charge worked together for the common good. They are individuals of great quality and character. I am confident that they take their job home with them---they worry about their Seniors who have no one: are they cold? are they sick? are they ok? Those involved in the *Meals on Wheels Program* did this because they care and for no other reason. They received no acknowledgement in the local paper or by County government. There was nothing. It was sad that they weren't even given a Thank You, but then again, that is not why they are part of this program---it is not about them---it is about those in need.

One cannot put a price on the cost of a hot meal and a smile and kind word. It is about respect, it is about caring and feeding the generation that sacrificed so much to feed us. They are our responsibility and we should be as those in the *Meals on Wheels Program*: serve them willingly and with joy and with respect. We are here to take care of each other and *Meals on Wheels* is the example we all should follow.



November 28, 2022

Stacy J. Stroman  
Director, Blueprints  
150 W. Beau St. Suite 304  
Washington PA 15301

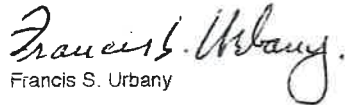
Dear Ms. Stroman,

I am writing to inform you about the fine work of your Carmichaels facility.

Over the years, Meals on Wheels has delivered daily meals to my sister, Dorothy [REDACTED]. Not only have the meals been welcome and nourishing, the daily visits have provided social contact for my sister who lives alone and is 101 years young in mind and spirit. Recently one of your volunteers, Helene [REDACTED], rang the door bell but Dorothy did not answer. After several repeated, return attempts to rouse Dorothy, Helene contacted a neighbor who had access to the house and he entered the house and found Dorothy had fallen and unable to get to get up. After assessing the situation they called an ambulance to take Dorothy to the Waynesburg hospital where she was examined and later transferred to a rehabilitation center, having broken a toe. After therapy Dorothy was subsequently released and has now returned to her home.

I tell you this because, without Helene's persistence and her efforts to rouse Dorothy, my sister may very have experienced a life threatening fall. Helene is to be commended for her good work as should all the volunteers of the Carmichaels Meals on Wheels center who serve the local community. In recognition and appreciation of their good service I wish to contribute \$ 250 to support the continuing, essential work of the Carmichaels center. Keep up the good work!

Best Regards,



Francis S. Urbany

6507 Anna Maria Ct.  
McLean, VA 22101

[furbanv@cox.net](mailto:furbanv@cox.net)  
+ 1 (703)-618-4900

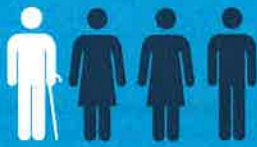
# THE ESCALATING ISSUE OF SENIOR HUNGER



2023 NATIONAL SNAPSHOT

The Meals on Wheels network is comprised of 5,000 community-based programs across the country dedicated to addressing senior hunger and isolation. The need is great, but Together, We Can Deliver.™

## OUR NATION'S SENIOR POPULATION IS GROWING AND CHANGING RAPIDLY.



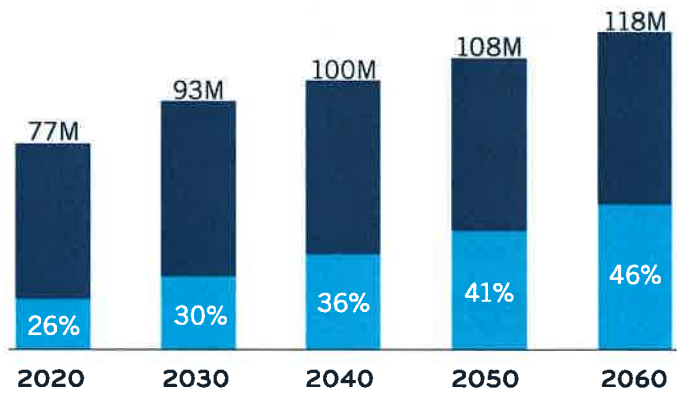
**1 IN 4 AMERICANS IS 60+**  
with 12,000 more turning 60 every day



### AMONG AMERICANS 60 AND OLDER:

- 29% HAVE A DISABILITY
- 24% LIVE ALONE
- 12% ARE VETERANS

THIS POPULATION IS SET TO REACH 93M IN THE NEXT DECADE, with 118M EXPECTED BY 2060 – increasing the number of seniors today by more than half.



■ 60+ people of color ■ 60+ White alone, not Hispanic

OLDER AMERICANS OF COLOR WILL CONTINUE TO MAKE UP AN INCREASINGLY LARGER PORTION OF THIS POPULATION.

## OLDER AMERICANS ARE LIVING LONGER WITH LESS MONEY.



Seniors on fixed incomes are **ESPECIALLY VULNERABLE** to increases in inflation and cost of living.



**1 IN 2 SENIORS LIVING ALONE** lacks the income to pay for basic needs

## SENIORS ARE AT GREATER RISK OF HUNGER AND MALNUTRITION.



**OLDER ADULTS ARE ALREADY AT HIGHER RISK OF MALNUTRITION** due to decreased appetite, mobility issues, prescription medications and more.

### FOOD INSECURITY DISPROPORTIONATELY AFFECTS OLDER ADULTS OF COLOR:

- 17%** OF BLACK SENIORS
- 14%** OF HISPANIC SENIORS
- 10%** OF SENIORS WHO IDENTIFIED AS ASIAN AMERICA, PACIFIC ISLANDER, NATIVE AMERICAN OR MULTI-RACIAL
- 6%** OF NON-HISPANIC SENIORS
- 6%** OF WHITE SENIORS

## THE MEALS ON WHEELS SOLUTION STARTS WITH THE MEAL...



## AND DELIVERS ON SO MUCH MORE.

### OF HOME DELIVERED MEAL PARTICIPANTS:



say the meals help  
**IMPROVE THEIR HEALTH**



say the services help them  
**FEEL MORE SECURE**



say the meals help them  
**LIVE INDEPENDENTLY**

**FUND AND SUPPORT MEALS ON WHEELS TODAY.**



# WHAT WE DELIVER



2023 NATIONAL SNAPSHOT

Meals on Wheels is a solution that addresses the escalating issues of senior hunger and isolation. The need is great, but Together, We Can Deliver.™

## IT STARTS WITH THE MEAL...



251 MILLION MEALS served annually



2.2 MILLION SENIORS served annually



7 OUT OF 10 LOCAL PROGRAMS are facing higher demand for home-delivered meals than before the pandemic

## AND DELIVERS ON SO MUCH MORE.

### SERVICES PROVIDED:

- 100% provide socialization opportunities
- 97% train drivers to keep an eye out for senior wellbeing
- 88% train drivers to keep an eye out for safety issues around the clients' home
- 66% connect seniors to services in the community when needs are identified
- 55% offer home repair and modification services
- 44% provide pet assistance

### THE IMPACT:



WE CAN SERVE A SENIOR FOR AN ENTIRE YEAR for roughly the same cost as a day in the hospital or 10 in a nursing home

Of home-delivered meal participants:



## BUT THERE ARE SIGNIFICANT CHALLENGES



DEMAND



FUNDING

The onset of the pandemic saw an influx of emergency funding, doubling support to address increased demand. However, this funding is receding while community need is not, and **PROGRAMS ARE STRUGGLING.**

Many local programs are taking drastic steps to sustain their programs amid funding challenges, including **ADDING SENIORS TO WAITING LISTS AND DISCONTINUING OR CUTTING BACK SERVICES.**

NEARLY ALL PROGRAMS REPORT ONE OR MORE CHALLENGES to serving home-delivered meals to all seniors in their community, such as:



LACK OF FUNDING TO PAY FOR MEALS



DIFFICULTY RECRUITING AND RETAINING VOLUNTEERS



RISING FOOD PRICES



DIFFICULTY HIRING AND RETAINING ENOUGH STAFF



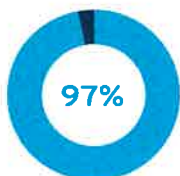
ESCALATING GAS PRICES



CONTINUING SUPPLY CHAIN ISSUES

## MEALS ON WHEELS PROGRAMS ARE READY AND WILLING TO DO MORE... WITH MORE RESOURCES.

REACHING ALL SENIORS WHO NEED MEALS IS CONSTRAINED BY FUNDING AND CAPACITY LIMITATIONS



97% of local programs believe there are seniors in their community who need meals who they **ARE NOT CURRENTLY SERVING.**



64% are confident that they could serve more seniors, **IF THE NEW CLIENTS CAME WITH MORE FUNDING.**

**FUND AND SUPPORT MEALS ON WHEELS TODAY.**

