

### Older Wisconsinites need your help.

**Budget Request:** Protect vulnerable older adults by increasing the state contribution to Home-Delivered Meal (HDM) Services from the current level of \$868,794<sup>1</sup> to \$13.5 million annually. This increase would enable Wisconsin’s Older Americans Act (OAA) HDM programs to meet the need in their communities.

Wisconsin is home to over 1.5 million older adults (ages 60+).<sup>2</sup> This equates to one of every four Wisconsin residents! The OAA HDM program is a proven, effective way to support Wisconsin’s most vulnerable older adults and their caregivers:

*“The program helped me keep my husband out of the nursing home for all but one year of his life.”*

*Program Recipient*

*“My mom is 100 years old; your program is a lifesaver.”*

*Caregiver of Program Recipient*

HDM services provide access to nutritious food, social visits, safety checks and connection to other community services to older adults in the most social and economic need. In 2023, **home-delivered meals programs provided the day's main meal for approximately 70% of the almost 34,000 program participants. Nearly 1 in 2 of the program participants are identified to have high nutritional risk and over 1 in 4 have incomes below the federal poverty level.**<sup>3</sup>

The services and resources older adults receive from the program play a crucial role in enabling people to live more nourished and independent lives in their homes, avoiding costly long-term care (LTC) institutions or worsened health outcomes.

**One year of home delivered meals and the services that accompany it roughly equates to the same cost of one day in the hospital or 10 days in the nursing home.**<sup>4</sup>

Fifteen percent (8) of the 54 HDM programs responding to a 2024 survey indicated they either have a waiting list or are at capacity and anticipate having one soon; however, waiting lists only tell part of the story. Over 90% (48) of respondents reported they have implemented some restrictions and limited services in part of their service area (reduced the number of days of hot delivery and/or reduced the number of frozen meals provided) or have areas of the county/tribe without service.

**WAAN's Position:** Hunger and isolation are pressing and urgent social issues for Wisconsin’s aging population. Older Americans Act Home-Delivered Meals (HDM) are an economical and proven means to address senior isolation, hunger, and malnutrition. **This program needs \$13.5 million annually to meet the need across the state.**

### Wisconsin Older Adults are at Elevated Risk!



**1 in 4 Live Alone (26.3%)**

*“Your meal program is a blessing to me. I am elderly and live alone. Don’t have any family close by”*

**~40% Live in a Rural Area**

*“[Helps me] have a sense of connection in our enclosed, small, lonely world”*



**1 in 10 Experience Limited or Uncertain Access to Adequate Food**

*“This is my only meal since FoodShare only gives me \$13 a month.”*

**1 in 5 Report Fair to Poor Health (20.8%)**

*“We were very depressed with no routine and running out of ideas for the microwave and losing weight fast. Thank you so much.”*



**More than Half Report 3+ Chronic Conditions**

*“I can’t cook anymore. Had a stroke I can get confused when cooking.”*

**1 in 4 Have a Disability (25.5%)**

*“I am blind and not able to cook at all.”*



**Wisconsin ranks 8th nationwide for social isolation risk for adults aged 65+.**

*“Reminds me to eat, social contact friendly face on a low day.”*

*-HDM Recipients Surveyed in 2023*

The program is **challenged** by:

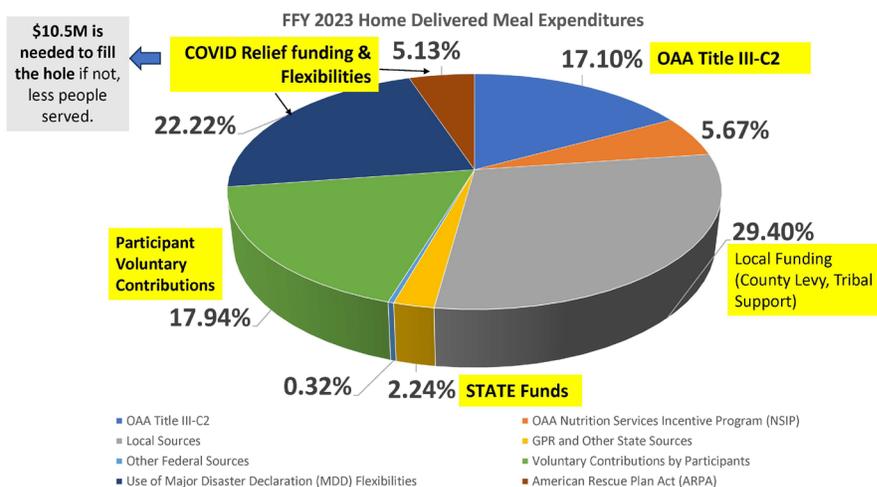
- **Federal Funding Cuts:** The Older Americans Act Nutrition Program sustained an **\$8 million cut at the federal level in 2024**. Local funding, (29% of the funding in 2023) is also at risk.<sup>5</sup>

- **Expiration of COVID Support (both funding and flexibilities):** By 2025, Wisconsin’s HDM program will have lost approximately \$10.5 million of COVID-relief accounting for over 27% of total HDM expenditures in 2023.

- **Unprecedented Levels of Need:** Demand for services has increased by 54% from 2019 to 2023.<sup>6</sup>

- **Increased Expenses driven by Inflation and a Lack of Resources:**

The average cost to provide a meal statewide is \$12.76/meal, a 17% increase over 2018 costs.<sup>6</sup> Over a third (36%) of programs surveyed indicated they are unable to service their entire geographic area due to lack of funding, insufficient volunteers or staff, or inadequate equipment to safely deliver a meal.



\*State GPR is allocated and spent on a CY basis, rather than FFY basis.

In 2023, only 17% of HDM funding came from the OAA. Although voluntary contributions from participants matched Older Americans Act dollars in 2023 (approx. 17% each), they are decreasing due to lack of income. Approximately, 42% of single older adult households and 20% of two-person older adult households in partnerships in Wisconsin lack the funds needed to pay for basic living needs.<sup>7</sup> These financial challenges further exacerbate the strain on our programs and highlight the urgent need for increased support and funding.

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. **We urge you to prioritize funding and support for the OAA Home Delivered Meals Program in our state. Join us in safeguarding the well-being and dignity of our seniors by ensuring they have continued access to these essential programs!**

Sources for this issue brief can be viewed at: <https://gwaar.org/api/cms/viewfile/id/2008155>

Find this and other WAAN issue briefs at: <https://gwaar.org/issues-and-initiatives>

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#### Core member organizations

Aging and Disability Professionals Association of Wisconsin (ADPAW) • Alzheimer’s Association Wisconsin Chapter Board on Aging and Long Term Care (BOALTC) • 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 Family and Caregiver Support Alliance (WFACSA) • Wisconsin Institute for Healthy Aging (WIHA) Wisconsin Senior Advocates • Wisconsin Senior Corps Association (WISCA) • Wisconsin Tribal Aging Unit Association

#### Mission

The Wisconsin Aging Advocacy Network (WAAN) works with and for all older adults by educating community members and policy makers on priority issues while advocating for meaningful change. Learn more at <https://gwaar.org/waan>.

## Safeguard Nutrition Support for Wis. Seniors Sources:

1. Based on federal fiscal year (FFY) 2023 Home-Delivered Meal Expenditures.
2. US Census, population estimates program 2022
3. Wisconsin 2023 Older Americans Act Report.
4. "What We Deliver," 2023 National Snapshot, Meals on Wheels America, <https://www.mealsonwheelsamerica.org/learn-more/what-we-deliver>
5. USAging FFY 2024 Appropriations Chart.
6. State OAA Reports
7. "Wisconsin's Aging Population By the Numbers," Meals on Wheels America fact sheet, Feb. 2024, [https://www.mealsonwheelsamerica.org/docs/default-source/fact-sheets/2024/2024-state-fact-sheets/state-fact-sheet-2024-wisconsin.pdf?sfvrsn=4b5d8e3b\\_2](https://www.mealsonwheelsamerica.org/docs/default-source/fact-sheets/2024/2024-state-fact-sheets/state-fact-sheet-2024-wisconsin.pdf?sfvrsn=4b5d8e3b_2)

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