

Safeguard Meals on Wheels

STATE ISSUE BRIEF

608-228-7253

gwaar.org/waan

janet.zander@gwaar.org

@WAAN.ACTION



Older Wisconsinites need your help.

Wisconsin is home to over 1.5 million older adults (ages 60+).¹ This equates to one of every four Wisconsin residents! The Older Americans Act (OAA) home-delivered meal (HDM) program is a proven, effective

way to support Wisconsinites as we age, as well as offer support to our family caregivers.

HDMs, often referred to as Meals on Wheels, are more than food – they are a vital service that sustains lives and independence by providing nutritious food, safety checks, socialization, and connections to services. **A 2023 survey data revealed for nearly 70% of the 34,000 people served, this meal was their main source of food and nutrition each day.**³

The program is **challenged** by:

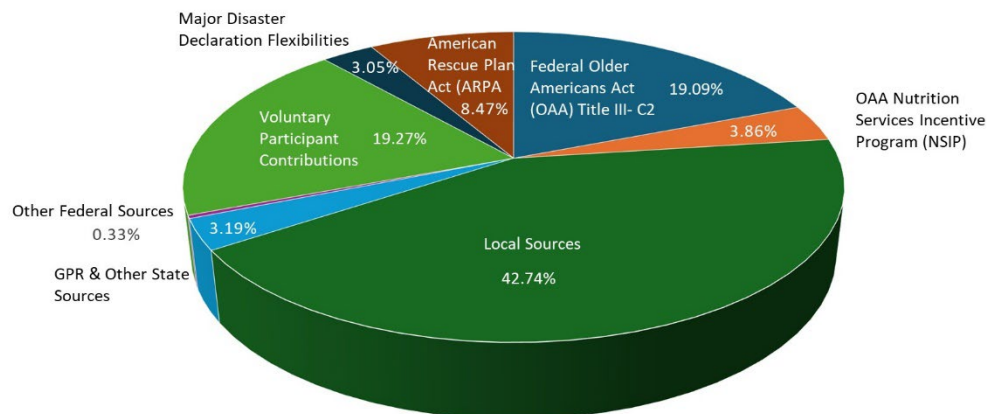
- **Unprecedented Levels of Need:** HDM program participation increased by 11% from 2019-2024. While the number of meals served increased by 17% during this same time.⁵
- **Expiration of Covid-19 Support (both funding and flexibilities):** Wisconsin's HDM program lost roughly \$10.5 million of Covid-19 relief, accounting for over 27% of total HDM expenditures in 2023.
- **Federal Funding Cuts:** The OAA Nutrition Program sustained **an overall federal cut of \$8 million in 2024.** Local funding (nearly 43% of the total funding in 2024) is also at risk.⁶

WAAN's Position:

Older Americans Act Home-Delivered Meals (HDM) are an economical and proven means to address isolation, hunger, and malnutrition among older people. **An increase of \$12.6 million in each year of the budget** (from the current funding level of \$868,794² to \$13.5 million annually) **is needed to meet the need across the state.**

- ❖ More than 75% of participants are age 75 +,
- ❖ 1 of every 2 lives alone, increasing their risk of isolation and food insecurity,
- ❖ Over half face high nutritional risk, putting their health in jeopardy, and
- ❖ More than 1 in 4 struggles to make ends meet, living with incomes below the federal poverty level.⁴

FFY 2024 Home Delivered Meal Expenditures



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- **Increased Expenses driven by Inflation and a Lack of Resources:** The average cost to provide a meal statewide in 2023 is approximately \$12.88/meal, an **18% increase over 2018 costs.**⁶ For many counties demand for HDMs exceeds their capacity.

Most of us plan to remain living in our homes as we age. HDM services help to make our plans a reality. The services and resources received from the program play a crucial role in enabling people to live more nourished and independent lives in their homes as they age, avoiding costly long-term care (LTC) institutions or worsened health outcomes.

One year of home-delivered meals and the services that accompany it roughly equate to the same cost of one day in the hospital or 10 days in the nursing home.⁷

Participant quotes:

“This is the only meal I get daily since FoodShare only gives me \$13 a month.”

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

“The driver reminds me to eat & brightens my low days.”

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

To ensure the most appropriate services are offered to each person, in 2024 some counties began implementing a meal prioritization process. This process is not limited to existing participants; new participants are being prioritized as well, since we don’t have sufficient funding to bring on everyone who needs services. Nineteen counties indicated the meal prioritization process is necessary due to a lack of funding, insufficient numbers of volunteers or staff, and/or increased food and supply costs.

Seven counties currently have a waitlist for meals, while several others anticipate needing to start a waitlist soon.⁸

The ability to access crucial HDM services in a timely and consistent manner is key to the program’s successful intervention to support the health and independence of older adults. Yet, reaching all older Wisconsinites who need meals remains constrained by funding and capacity limitations.

We urge you to prioritize funding and support for the OAA Home Delivered Meals Program. Join us in safeguarding the well-being and dignity of older Wisconsinites by ensuring they have continued access to this essential program!



HELP US END THE WAIT. FUND AND SUPPORT MEALS ON WHEELS.

Sources for this issue brief can be viewed at: <https://gwaar.org/api/cms/viewFile/id/2008497>

Find this and other WAAN issue briefs at: <https://gwaar.org/issues-and-initiatives> (rev. 3-26-25) 2/3

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 gwaar.org/waan.

Safeguard Meals on Wheels Sources:

1. State Fact Sheet 2024 – Wisconsin, Meals on Wheels America, https://www.mealsonwheelsamerica.org/docs/default-source/fact-sheets/2024/2024-state-fact-sheets/state-fact-sheet-2024-wisconsin.pdf?sfvrsn=4b5d8e3b_2.
2. Based on federal fiscal year (FFY) 2023 Home-Delivered Meal Expenditures.
3. Wisconsin 2023 Older Americans Act Report.
4. Wisconsin 2024 Older Americans Act Report.
5. State OAA Reports
6. Wisconsin FFY 2024 Expenditures Chart, Wisconsin Department of Health Services.
7. “What We Deliver,” 2025 National Snapshot Fact Sheet, Meals on Wheels America, <https://www.mealsonwheelsamerica.org/docs/default-source/fact-sheets/2025/what-we-deliver-2025-national-snapshot-fact-sheet-feb25.pdf>.
8. “GWAAR Service Area Meal Prioritization-Waitlist Notification Form,” Greater Wisconsin Agency on Aging Resources, Inc., 2024-2025.

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