



Vermont
Association of
Area Agencies
on Aging

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Member Agencies:

Age Well
Central Vermont Council on Aging
Northeast Kingdom Council on Aging
Southwestern Vermont Council on Aging
Senior Solutions

To: House and Senate Committees on Appropriations
From: Janet Hunt, Executive Director
Re: FY 2022 State Budget Testimony
Date: February 8, 2021

I am testifying today on behalf of the Vermont Association of Area Agencies on Aging regarding older adults who face the risk of malnutrition or who may already be malnourished.

Good nutrition helps support a healthy and active lifestyle, improves health outcomes, and reduces healthcare costs. In contrast, malnutrition, particularly the lack of adequate protein, calories, and other nutrients needed for tissue maintenance or repair, has shown to be associated with poor health outcomes, frailty, falls, disability, and increased healthcare costs.

Adult malnutrition is a growing crisis in America today. According to 2018 statistics from Feeding America, nearly 5.3 million citizens who are 60 and older currently face hunger in our country. That equates to 1 out of every 14 older adults who are food insecure.

- Vermont's older adult population is 168,999, comprising 27% of the overall population - ranking third in the country.
- Older adults in Vermont who are threatened by hunger (marginally food insecure) is 20,618 (12%)
- Older Vermonters who are at risk of hunger (food insecure) is 9,295 (6%)

Our Area Agencies on Aging, along with our meal site providers, are pro-active in working to solve the problems of malnutrition among our older adult population. We provide nutritional counseling to individuals as well as thousands of meals each week. Although the standard is three meals a day, seven days a week, for many older Vermonters, we are only able to provide one nutritious meal a day, five days a week, at best.

The numbers I share with you from 2019 reflect our dire situation before COVID-19, but are now exacerbated by COVID-19:

- Total number of all meals provided in Vermont, both home-delivered, and community meals was 1,044,664.
- Total cost of all meals using \$10.00 per meal as average was \$10,446,640.
- Total FY20 DAIL funds, including federal Older American Act and State funds: \$4,664,460 (approximately \$4.47 per meal). This leaves a gap of \$5.53 per meal.
- The difference needed in overall funding is \$5,782,180.

Our request: \$1 million dollars over the next three years, totaling \$3 million.

With this funding, we can begin to reduce the gap. Even though we are not entirely filling the gap, we believe this request is a reasonable start to meet the nutritional needs of older Vermonters.

In order to address the struggles our older adults face with hunger and isolation, the state must invest more fully in meals to ensure vulnerable older Vermonters can remain healthier at home, avoiding more costly healthcare facilities.

Thank you for your consideration.