



**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 Human Services Committee  
**From:** Janet Hunt, Executive Director  
**Regarding:** Report on Meals to Older Vermonters and Other Vulnerable Populations  
**Date:** February 16, 2021

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of the Vermont Association of Area Agencies on Aging regarding the Report by the Department of Disabilities, Aging and Independent Living (DAIL) on Meals to Older Vermonters And Other Vulnerable Populations. After my comments on the report, I would also like to follow up with you regarding some testimony I presented to the Appropriations Committees last week.

**Comments on the Report**

V4A finds that the Report by DAIL on Meals to Older Vermonters And Other Vulnerable Populations is reflective of the activities over the course of the last eleven months since the start of the pandemic.

*Coronavirus Relief Funds (CRF)*

We greatly appreciate the COVID-19 Relief Funds to help meet the nutritional needs of older Vermonters. It allowed the Area Agencies on Aging (AAA) to provide additional funds to our meal site partner agencies to meet the increased demand of approximately 40%. Due to the CDC and state guidelines and the need to shut-down congregate meal sites, people were unable to receive their daily meal at the meal site. Fortunately, meal sites creatively worked to offer “meals-to-go”. Our volunteer network expanded to be able to provide more home delivered meals with the increased demand.

*Meals Cost Analysis*

In response to recommendations in the DAIL report, the AAAs worked with meal providers to create the Meals Cost Analysis. This was provided to DAIL in December. Our work on meals cost analysis was a very beneficial exercise and we will continue to focus on opportunities to improve our systems. There are many aspects of our meal programs to consider, especially as we work to enhance our operations to better meet the demand in the recovery phase after the pandemic.

*Additional Funding*

In the report, DAIL concluded that “More funding could be very beneficial in bolstering the nutrition programs and meal providers given that they have had limited funding for many years.” V4A concurs with this.

## Concerns

### 1. Recommendation to reduce meals:

*“If the minimum reimbursement rate was set higher than current AAA reimbursement rates or pre-COVID rates, some AAAs and meal providers might not be able to serve as many meals per year. AAAs would likely need to consider prioritizing meals for those in greatest need and offering alternatives such as grocery delivery to others.”*

The V4A does not believe that meal prioritization (which would ultimately generate waitlists) is in the best interest of those vulnerable older adults seeking support from our programs. Meal reimbursement rates need to keep up with the cost of living and the cost of goods and service increases year over year. In addition, we know that we have a growing older adult population and the demands have increased and these will continue to rise. V4A, meal providers, and DAIL should be advocating for the funding needed to assure reasonable rates in regions where this is applicable, with a proactive plan to address sufficient funding to allow for sustainability and the anticipated growth in participation rates across the state.

### 2. Home-Delivered Meals Transition Plan

Contrary to advocating for more adequate funding, as indicated in the report, to meet the needs of older Vermonters, DAIL requested the AAAs to each produce a Home-Delivered Meals Transition Plan for the purposes of developing a response to the increased caseload of participants in the program. DAIL requested, for example:

1. Analyze in detail how many, and when, if necessary, clients could be placed on a waiting list or receive fewer HDM meals and/or pickup meals.
2. Outline waitlist management strategies
3. Describe any plans to reduce the frequency of meal delivery and/or number of meals/week.
4. Describe a communication plan to inform clients that services are being reduced and/or services are being terminated.
5. Describe how much advance notice will be given to clients whose services will be terminated or reduced.

We believe that more funding, not waitlists, is the appropriate direction in which to go.

## Additional Funding

This is a good segue to address my testimony made to the Appropriations committee last week. We requested \$1 million for the meals programs. We request this amount so that the AAAs and meal providers can meet the ever-growing needs of our increasing older adult population. If our collective mission is for Vermont to be the best state in which to grow old or to live with a disability – with dignity, respect, and independence, then we need to work together with DAIL, our Area Agencies on Aging and our senior centers and meal site providers to create systematic approach to cover the costs of nutritious meals adequately and continue to recognize that the cost must be sustained on a long-term basis.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak about our meals programs for older Vermonters.