



# VASCAMP

Vermont Association  
of Senior Centers and  
Meal Providers

Deanna Jones

Chair, Vermont Association of Senior Centers and Meal Providers

Executive Director, [The Thompson Senior Center](#), Woodstock

# Who is VASCAMP?

- ▶ Formed in 2014, VASCAMP is a network of senior centers and meal providers, led by a volunteer steering committee, who meet monthly to share ideas, support each other and make connections throughout the state.

## VASCAMP Steering Committee:

Deanna Jones (Chair) from [The Thompson Senior Center](#)

Jo Ann Riley from [Castleton Community Seniors](#)

April Cioffi from [The Godnick Adult Center](#)

Melinda Gervais-Lamoureux from Island Pond Community Services

Mark Bradley from [Bugbee Senior Center](#)

Rebecca Isham from [South Burlington Recreation & Parks Senior Center](#)

Nicole Fournier Grisgraber from [Meals on Wheels of Lamoille County](#)

# VASCAMP MISSION & VISION

## Mission Statement

The mission of the **Vermont Association of Senior Centers and Meal Providers** is to support and advocate for senior centers and meal sites on a statewide level, promote the growth and quality of these centers and strengthen the professional skills of the staff and volunteers at senior centers and meal sites.

## Vision Statement

The **Vermont Association of Senior Centers and Meal Providers** cultivates a unified voice and dynamic network of centers, meal providers, and professionals committed to excellence and responsive to the needs of the state's growing older population.

# VASCAMP Current Status

- ▶ VASCAMP has no budget, no paid staff, no lobbyist, and a volunteer steering committee with members from each region of the state
- ▶ Actively working on becoming a 501c3 with plans to hire a staff director
  - ▶ Capacity building grant from the Administration for Community Living

The background features abstract, overlapping geometric shapes in various shades of green, ranging from light to dark, creating a modern and dynamic visual effect. The shapes are primarily triangles and polygons, some with varying levels of transparency, set against a white background.

Why is it so important to have  
a strong support network for senior  
centers and meal providers?

# Vermont Demographics

- ▶ Census projections indicate that people age 65-79 are still the fastest growing age group in Vermont.



## Executive Summary

Following the 2020 Decennial Census and the COVID-19 pandemic, many people want to know how Vermont's population by age group has changed. A state's population by age group affects not only the demand for public services but also its labor force, revenues, and overall economic activity. This Issue Brief compares 2021 Census Bureau estimates with those based on the 2010 Decennial Census. Between those years, Vermont's population increased by roughly 20,000. The distribution of the state's population by age group changed significantly over that time as well, with the biggest increase in Vermonters ages 65 to 79. Over the same time, the number of children and mid-career working-age folks dropped.

*Since 2010, Vermont's population increased by roughly 20,000 people, including a big swell in older people, ages 65 to 79. But the number of children and mid-career working-age folks dropped.*

Vermont's population numbers for 2021 come from the U.S. Census Bureau estimates using the 2020 Census and other current data sources. The population estimate based on the 2010 Census remains the most reliable for comparison. Estimates for the intercensal years (2011 through 2019) were based on small surveys and will be revised in the coming year using data from the 2020 Census.

- Overall, population estimates for Vermont increased almost 20,000 from about 625,900 in 2010 to about 645,600 in 2021.
- The number of Vermonters ages 65 to 79 increased significantly, up more than 40,000, as many baby boomers moved into their retirement years; the share of Vermonters ages 65 to 79 rose from 10.5 percent to 16.4 percent.

“Support systems are key in mitigating the multiple challenges older adults faced during the pandemic, such as increased health risks and social isolation”

January 12, 2023

Vermont's senior centers and meal providers are on the front lines of supporting socialization and engagement and preventing isolation.

"They are essential in the state's effort to support healthy aging and prevent or delay institutionalization."



“Compared with their peers, senior center participants have higher levels of health, social interaction, and life satisfaction.”



# Role of Senior Centers

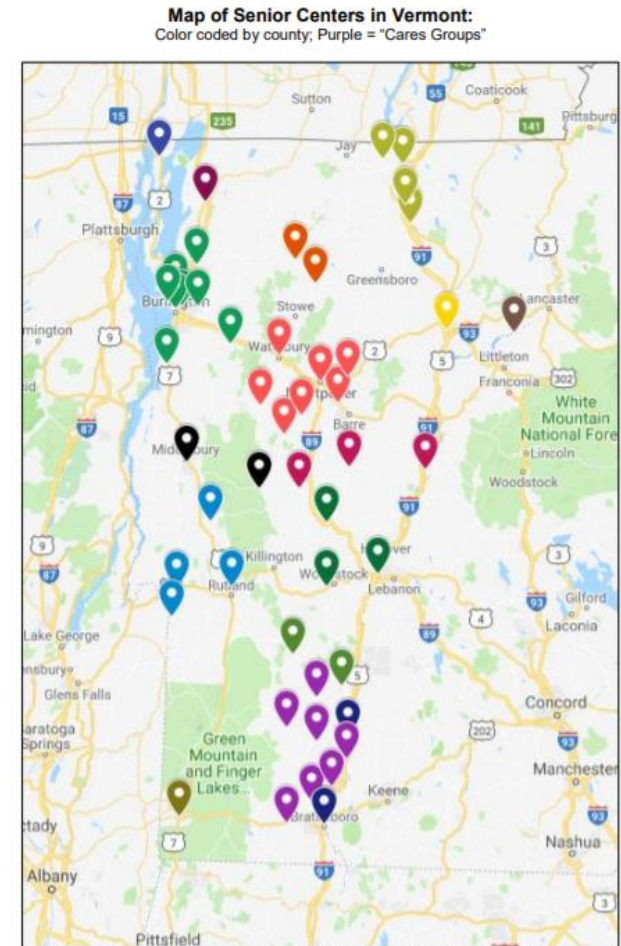
- Support socialization and engagement
- Prevent isolation
- Support healthy aging and prevent or delay institutionalization
- Provide meals, activities, and social opportunities for little to no cost for participants



# Vermont Senior Center Survey

- 3rd year of DAIL Survey.  
In 2021, 36 responses received of 42 identified centers. 2022 survey expanded to all senior centers and meal providers.  
Results coming soon.
- 81% of centers indicated that they had 501(c)(3) federal tax-exempt status and 19% reported being under a Municipal Department

<https://asd.vermont.gov/services/vermont-senior-centers>



# Participation and Access

- 92% of senior centers serve between three and ten towns. 8% serve over 15 towns!
- Estimated 11,500 to 15,000 served
- The range of unduplicated older Vermonters served annually ranged from 60 to 2,300

# Programming Offered

Social events (100%)

Exercise classes (83%)

Wellness education (72%)

Arts and crafts (72%)

Recreational (81%)

Organized trips (56%)

Health screenings/clinics (67%)

Educational speakers (78%)

Online learning/computer classes (22%)

Cooking classes (19%)

Legal/financial assistance (19%)

Other (22%)

# Nutrition Programs

- 89% of respondents offer meals at least once a week.  
11% do not offer meals
- Centers cited financial barriers as challenges in expanding their nutrition programs
- 67% of respondents indicated that they had a contract with an Area Agency on Aging to provide meals

# Budget & Revenue

- In 2021, the average operating budget was \$142,000 although that number is higher than 45% of senior centers in the state
  - Budgets reported range from \$20,000 to \$650,000 annually
  - 39% of senior centers reported an annual operating budget of less than \$100,000
- Only 10 respondents reported that they receive Older Americans Act funds for non-meal related activities (these included certification costs for Tai Chi instructors, a few sites receiving \$500/month for transportation, and help with capital expenses such as appliances)

# Budget & Revenue

- Sources of Revenue:
  - Town recreation department funding
  - Funding from petitions/towns served
  - Donors/events/fundraising
  - Area Agency on Aging (OAA meal contracts)
  - Participant contributions
  - Foundation grants
  
- 50% of senior centers reported their BIGGEST challenges were around the costs of operating the facility, paying employees, or funding (up from 36% in 2018)

# Understanding the Indirect Costs of Offering Programs at Senior Centers:

- ▶ Vermont's senior centers & meal providers receive no dedicated federal or state funding for administration or operations. While meal sites may contract with AAAs to receive a portion of the cost of the meals, for many centers in Vermont, their primary source of funding is their own fundraising efforts via town meetings, special events and participant contributions.
- ▶ Recognizing the value of diverse programming in supporting healthy aging and attracting new participants, many senior centers want to offer new programs at their centers, but without additional funding, their capacity to sustain new programming is limited.
- ▶ Costs to senior centers for hosting a “free program” can include heat, electricity, insurance, and staffing to open the building, schedule the programs, marketing/outreach for the programs, answer questions about the classes, register participants, coordinating volunteers, and more.



# Responding to COVID- We still are!



# Responding to COVID-19: Serving those most at risk!

- Meals on Wheels deemed “essential service”
- Centers pivoted quickly
  - Developing & Implementing safety procedures
  - Coordinating with town emergency planning teams
  - Many Meals on Wheels programs doubled (additionally many centers distributed *Everyone Eats* meals)
  - Dining room meals converted to Curbside meals
  - Friendly Check-in & Buddy programs
  - Grocery shopping delivery, RX delivery

# Responding to COVID-19: Serving those most at risk!

- Created Remote Services to Reduce Social Isolation
  - Virtual Senior Centers launched
    - Exercise & Movement
    - Creative Arts
    - Technology support, Language classes
    - Life-long learning, Travel, History classes
  - Phone programs for those without technology

# Responding to COVID-19: Serving those most at risk!

- Modified one-on-one in-person services continued for things like foot clinics and taxes, even when group programs were canceled
- Drive-in, Drive-by, and outdoor programming maintained connections
- Varying levels of service throughout the state - depended on Covid cases, staff capacity and community comfort level
- Senior Centers & Meal providers played an important role in sharing trusted information with older adults

# Current Status of Senior Centers & Meal Providers

- Most centers have re-opened for in-person meals and programs varied by site due to covid concerns, staffing or budget issues
- All centers are open in some capacity. While many are fully in-person for meals and programs, some are still struggling to re-open in person dining
- Many centers are continuing to offer a mix of both virtual and in-person programs (hybrid) & take-out meals to meet their participants needs
- Covid response is still ongoing



Woodstock



Montpelier





Photo: Geoff Hansen, Valley News

South Burlington

White River Junction



# Successes

- Pandemic response!
- Engaged, active older adults (socialization)!
- Evolving programming to meet community needs
- Community partnerships
- Volunteer engagement





# Changing Needs & Evolving Centers

- Aging at Home support programs (Village Model)
- Lifelong learning and educational events
- Farm & Field to Table Nutrition programs
- Health Initiatives and partnerships with hospitals/healthcare providers
  - Medically tailored meals
  - Hospital to home transitions
- Evidence-based programs
  - Falls prevention
  - Exercise variety
  - Health/Chronic disease management



# Challenges

- Finances & program sustainability
- **Growing food and supply costs**
- Transportation
- Physical space
- Aging volunteer base, staffing/Staff turnover
- Access to technology
- Safe environment post Covid

# Current Critical Challenge

- ▶ Growth in need for home-delivered meals paired with drastically increasing food & supply costs is creating an even larger gap
  - ▶ Meals must meet dietary requirements in OAA
  - ▶ Some food costs examples shared by meal sites:
    - ▶ A case of lettuce that was \$34/case a year ago is now \$69/case. Butter, eggs, fruit, meat, packaging all have similar increases
    - ▶ Average variable cost per meal (not including payroll & overhead) is \$4.12/meal. In 2020 it was \$3.73. An increase of .39 cents over 2 years when serving 30,000 meals a year, means an additional \$11,000 deficit to maintain the same level of service

# Thriving centers have these things in common!

- High quality staff
- Active boards and volunteers
- Good food
- Diverse activities
- Community investment



# Most Importantly - Voices of those we serve

*“We plan our day around meals at the senior center. It helps us stretch our grocery budget because we can eat at the center for lunch and have crackers, cheese, & an apple for dinner.”*

*“I’ve never really been able to cook well for myself and when I was diagnosed with diabetes I was really scared. But, I talk with the chef at the senior center every month and we make notes on the menu. He knows what helps me. My doctor is happy, and I’m healthier than I’ve been in many years.”*

# Most Importantly - Voices of those we serve

*“Before the pandemic occurred visiting the Center was something to look forward to each week, getting together for projects, learning tai chi, meeting new people, and seeing old friends. Totally enjoyable and worthwhile.*

*During the pandemic it was a life line. It meant that three times a week I was able to be in a Zoom class where I could see and talk to friends, and also continue with tai chi classes. They also supplied meals-to-go on special occasions that we were able to pick up. I will never forget the Center workers standing outside in the freezing cold distributing those meals as the cars drove by.*

*Now that we are back to having in person classes, I have a greater appreciation of the Center and the people who do such great work there. They do so much for so many.”*



# Most Importantly - Voices of those we serve

*“Over the past eight months, coping with a broken leg, then Covid and my companion’s major health problems, I’ve been blessed to know my friends at the senior center have my back. Meals on Wheels when I had to be a full-time caregiver, or spend days at the hospital, coming home too exhausted to cook. Medical equipment. Grocery shopping. My flu shot. Practical advice on local services. Checking in, to offer emotional support. I can’t imagine how I’d make it through this without you! And I know I’m not alone in saying so—you are all a blessing to this community.”*

For Vermont's senior centers to  
thrive into the future  
we need to continue to  
transform and evolve.

But we cannot do this alone.



# VASCAMP 2023 Goals

- Utilize ACL grant for VASCAMP capacity building to hire a staff person and establish VASCAMP as a 501c3
- Raise awareness about the critical link between strengthening senior centers and preventing isolation
- Continue monthly meetings of VASCAMP network with DAIL and AAAs to share best practices and innovations with each other
- Advocate for sustainable long-term support of senior centers & meal sites

# Check us Out!



**FIND SENIOR CENTERS ONLINE at:**  
<https://asd.vermont.gov/services/vermont-senior-centers>  
and on Facebook  
@vermontseniorcenters

