

Testimony to House Appropriations Committee

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- Representing Vermont Association of Senior Centers and Meal Providers serving thousands of older Vermonters daily
- Provide meals, transportation, wellness programs, social connection, and aging-at-home supports
- Senior centers are the local, trusted place in the community that connects older Vermonters with nutrition programs, services, and wellness opportunities they need to age well.

The Growing Need

- Vermont is one of the oldest states in the nation
- 150,000+ Vermonters age 60+
- Fastest growing demographic with one in 3 over 60 by 2030
- Just under 8% of older Vermonters face food insecurity
- More than 25% live alone
- Nearly 1 million home-delivered meals provided in 2024

How does MOW support the goals of Age Strong Vermont?

Core Component of Aging-in-Place Strategy

Meals on Wheels is a foundational part of Age Strong Vermont's vision for supporting older Vermonters to live safely and independently in their own homes and communities.

Promotes Health & Nutrition

By delivering balanced, nutritious meals, Meals on Wheels helps prevent malnutrition and diet-related health issues that can lead to hospitalizations or early institutionalization.

Reduces Isolation

Regular meal delivery includes daily wellness checks and social contact with volunteers, decreasing loneliness and supporting mental well-being — a key priority of Age Strong Vermont.

Supports Well-Being and Preventive Care

The program helps identify health or safety concerns early through regular check-ins, allowing senior centers and partners to connect participants with services before needs escalate.

Strengthens Community Networks

Meals on Wheels fosters community connection and volunteer engagement, aligning with Age Strong Vermont's goal of building local capacity for aging supports.

Cost-Effective Alternative to Higher-Cost Care

By keeping older adults healthier at home and reducing avoidable hospital admissions or nursing home placements, Meals on Wheels helps contain long-term care costs — a central focus of Age Strong Vermont's preventive approach.

The Funding Reality

- True average cost per home-delivered meal (FY24 DAIL Study): **\$13.43**
- Current combined funding per meal: **~\$4.10**
- Statewide annual shortfall: **~\$7 million**
- Inflation since 2024 adds approximately **\$1.4 million** in additional annual costs

- Some providers will hit reimbursement caps before the fiscal year ends

Why It Matters

- Meals on Wheels reduces:
 - Hunger
 - Isolation
 - Hospitalizations
 - Premature nursing home placement
- Cost-effective prevention strategy
- Keeps older Vermonters healthy and independent at home
- Avoids significantly higher long-term care costs

What We Are Requesting

- **\$1 million additional investment in FY27**
 - Roughly **\$1 more per meal**
 - Align reimbursement closer to actual cost
 - Prevent waiting lists
 - Stabilize providers facing rising food, labor, and transportation costs

Bottom Line

- This is not just about meals
- It is about dignity, independence, and fiscal responsibility
- Investing now prevents far higher costs later

Though I'm here to talk about making sure older Vermonters have access to nutrition and support to remain in their homes. I also want to leave you with the need to support our home and community based service providers. Vermont will need 50% more SNF beds by 2030 and level funding of our HCBS providers will only drive demand to our most expensive care providers Nursing homes - According to the division of rate setting the average daily nursing home Medicaid cost is \$389.98 as of January 1.

Thank you for your leadership and commitment to Vermont's older Vermonters.