

I'm Deanna Jones, the director for The Thompson Senior Center in Woodstock. As the president of the Vermont association of senior centers and meal providers, I am here to represent our collective voice and the thousands of older adults that we collectively serve with meals, transportation, exercise, social opportunities, aging at home referral services, and much more.

I am here to tell you that we - your community based service providers - are doing more with less than ever before and many of us are struggling to keep up with demand. With the growth in our aging demographic combined with their personal expenses, we see more older adults each month and thousands of Vermonters rely on our meals as their main meal of the day. In Woodstock alone, we are seeing 20 new people through our doors each month and even in an area where we often hear that there isn't as much need, we delivered 25 bags of Veggie Van Go produce this week to people who count on them each month. Look around the state and you'll see this happening over and over -- in Lamoille county yesterday they packed grocery bags at the Johnson Food Shelf which they do every month to deliver to homebound recipients.

While we are very grateful that there was state & Medicaid funding that was added to help fund home delivered Meals on Wheels in 2025 it amounted to about 60 cents per meal, and while that may seem like a lot, it barely keeps up with the growth in food and staffing expenses. Things like fresh fruit that are necessary to meet dietary requirements are \$5-\$6 more per pound now than they were at this time last year. AND, with the caps that AAAs have implemented for number of meals that will be reimbursed, it in effect take us back to even lower per meal reimbursement rates than prior to when those state funds were added. For many of us, the caps in place this year are thousands of meals lower than the number of meals we provided last year and are currently serving. This means when we hit the caps in a few months, we will be completely unfunded for meals for the remainder of the year. We receive no direct state or federal funding for meals & other services other than this per meal amount and have to fill the gaps ourselves.

In closing, and most importantly - in the words 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 an apple for dinner."

"We are so fortunate to have a Senior Center in our community that gives us access to any kind of help we need. Thank you from a grateful, soon to be 95 year old!"

"Thank you for the flowers that came with the meal. It brightens up each day at my dinner table. Its people like you that make life worth living. Your meal people always brighten up the days."

Please remember senior centers and meal providers in your funding process. Working together we can strengthen this critical network that is a daily lifeline to so many older Vermonters.

Respectfully submitted,  
Deanna Jones, Board President, Vermont Association of Senior Centers and Meal Providers(VASCAMP)