

How Older Vermonters' Meals Are Funded & Managed Vermont Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs) – February 24, 2026

The Core Role of Vermont's AAAs

AAAs are federally required regional entities responsible for the regional accountability and coordination structure required under federal law and state regulations. They must ensure compliance with federal law and direct available resources to those with *greatest* need by:

- Assessing community needs and eligibility
 - Developing multi-year Area Plans
 - Contracting with, and monitoring, providers to hold accountability for quality outcomes/services.
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Meals Funding

Meal funding is not a simple pass-through to Senior Centers and Meal Sites. At each step, there are federal requirements, fiscal, and quality/compliance controls, including eligibility standards to meet. OAA nutrition funding is designed to:

- ✓ Target limited resources to the most food insecure older Vermonters
- ✓ Ensure federal compliance and fiscal accountability
- ✓ Support a coordinated regional system — not isolated sites

**Funds: Federal Government → Vermont DAIL (State Unit on Aging) →
Vermont AAAs → Local Meal Providers/Senior Centers**

Global Commitment funding may only be used for individuals scoring A–D on the required prioritization scale (those at highest risk for food insecurity or malnutrition). In addition, providing meals to individuals who do not meet eligibility criteria is not allowed under the OAA and may result in funding adjustments. *The system prioritizes equity, accountability, and measurable need.*

Out of the \$2.3 million GF/GC appropriation, no administrative costs are withheld by the AAAs.

What the Funding Covers (It's More Than the Meal Itself)

OAA nutrition funding supports the full system:

- Intake, screening, and referrals through AAA Helplines
 - Eligibility assessment and required reassessments
 - Evidence-based food insecurity screening
 - Prioritization scoring (required under federal law)
 - Nutrition program oversight staff
 - Contract management and fiscal monitoring with senior centers and meals sites
 - Area Plan administration (federally mandated)
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Caps on Meals within Meal Site Contracts

Meal caps for Meals on Wheels (MOW) and congregate meal sites within contracts with Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs) are primarily driven by funding limitations, local capacity, and the

need to manage program efficiency. Contracts typically define these limits. Other considerations include:

- **"Not to Exceed" Funding:** Contracts often establish a maximum dollar amount for the agreement (e.g., specific amounts for Title III-C1 Congregate and NSIP funding), creating a practical cap on the number of meals that can be served.
- **Site Caps and Capacity:** Contracts may stipulate a maximum number of meals a vendor can produce or deliver per day to ensure food safety and efficiency.
- **Service Frequency Constraints:** While the OAA requires that MOW be available at least five days a week, a minimum of 3 meals per week is sometimes used as a contractual standard for participation in certain areas.
- **Meals Per Day Limits:** Generally, MOW is designed for one, perhaps two, meals per day, though providers have the flexibility to serve more based on resource availability.
- **Waitlist Management:** If a provider hits their contractually capped number of meals, they must often implement a waitlist for new clients.

The challenge with caps arises when there is more demand than supply. It is a cost/volume equation. If there is not enough money, then caps come into play.

Accountability & Oversight

DAIL approves and monitors AAA budgets for federal compliance. AAAs must report regularly to DAIL under structured reporting requirements. To do so, AAAs must monitor local meal providers for eligibility, fiscal compliance, and performance. Administrative retention of senior centers and meal sites by AAAs supports the federal and state contract oversight requirements and program monitoring (there is no discretionary spending). This structure protects taxpayer dollars and ensures funds reach eligible Vermonters with highest social and economic need.

Criteria for Determining Meals Funding

Under Title II and Title III of the Older Americans Act, AAAs must allocate funds based on:

- ❖ Community Needs Assessments
- ❖ Targeting low-income, rural, and socially isolated older adults
- ❖ Identifying service gaps
- ❖ Priority for Greatest Economic & Social Need - Federal law requires prioritization of those most vulnerable
- ❖ Core Service Capacity
- ❖ Congregate or home-delivered meals
- ❖ Transportation or supportive services
- ❖ Ability to consistently meet quality, reporting and safety standards
- ❖ Performance & Compliance
- ❖ Fiscal accountability
- ❖ Outcome tracking
- ❖ Focal point sustainability and ability to leverage other funding

Bottom Line:- Not every site automatically qualifies for OAA funding. *Funding decisions are based on need, consistent compliance for cost, quality, and service outcomes to the most vulnerable Vermonters.*