



Vermont
Association of
Area Agencies
on Aging

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**Vermont Association of Area Agencies on Aging's (V4A) Testimony
on the Governor's Recommended Fiscal Year 2026 Budget
Vermont House Committee on Appropriations and Senate Committee on Appropriations
February 13, 2025**

I am Mary Hayden, Executive Director of the Vermont Association of Area Agencies on Aging. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today in support of budget items that impact older Vermonters.

1. Meals on Wheels

We greatly appreciate your committee's support for adding \$1 million to the base budget for Meals on Wheels in 2023, and in 2024, amending Vermont's Global Commitment to Health Section 1115 demonstration waiver to allow home-delivered meals to be a Medicaid-covered service, increasing the total state and federal matched funding to \$2.3 million to serve the most food insecure.

- A total of \$4.3 million, which requires an additional **\$2 million in the SFY2026 base budget for Meals on Wheels.**
 - If appropriate, we support the legislature reaching \$4.3 million by increasing Meals on Wheels in the Global Commitment to Health Section 1115 demonstration waiver.
- V4A also supports the Vermont Foodbank's request for **\$5 million in total in FY26.**

Meals on Wheels targets vulnerable older Vermonters who cannot afford, access, or prepare food. It helps them remain at home. It provides prepared meals meeting USDA guidelines delivered by community volunteers. It also offers therapeutic meals for chronic disease management. Funding for the Older Vermonters Nutrition Program does not meet the current and future needs of older Vermonters.

- Last year, **Older Vermonter Nutrition Programs** provided 1,000,000 **nutritious meals** to nearly 17,000 older Vermonters.
- Providing emergency meals and delivery to older Vermonters stranded due to this year's catastrophic flood and power outage events caused more budget shortfalls.
- Funding for senior nutrition has not kept pace with the aging population.
- Last year, the legislature added \$1 million to the base budget for home-delivered and congregate meals for seniors. This welcome increase did not provide enough meals for our growing demographic of older Vermonters.

V4A also supports the Vermont Foodbank's request for **\$5 million in base funding.**

Dementia Respite Grant-Request for an additional \$750,000 in the SFY26 Base Budget for a total of \$1 million.

V4A joins the Vermont Chapter of the Alzheimer's Association in supporting increasing the amount allocated to the AAAs for the Dementia Respite Grant (DRG) by \$750,000.00. This small grant has been flat-funded at \$250,000 for over 20 years and can serve only a fraction of the growing population of unpaid caregivers of loved ones with dementia.

There are 19,000 unpaid dementia Caregivers in Vermont. While caring for a loved one may be very rewarding, VT caregivers report high levels of adverse health and social impacts, compared with other states:

- 61% have chronic health conditions
- 35% with depression
- 11% in poor physical health

Caregivers frequently report:

- Higher levels of burden and stress, depression or other adverse mental health outcomes, strain, and difficulty navigating care transitions as compared to other caregivers or non-caregivers.
- Depleted income and finances due in part to disruptions in employment and paying for health care or other services.
- Provide on average 27 hours more caregiving hours per month than caregivers of people without dementia.
- Many caregivers of people with Alzheimer's or other dementias are at risk of social isolation.

Providing regular respite relief to caregivers reduces pressure on residential care services and emergency departments, making it a cost-effective investment. But the current funding is so low, in many cases the respite dollars can only cover a few weeks of services.

Long-Term Care

As a member of the Long-Term Care Crisis Coalition, V4A supports the coalition's request for:

1. Full implementation of the increases for home-based Choices for Care services and Enhanced Residential Care (ERC) described in the February 15, 2023, DVHA rate study (~**\$6 million in General Fund dollars**).
2. An inflationary adjustment of **4%** to all long-term care reimbursement rates to reflect rising costs.