

March 28, 2025

MN House of Representatives
Human Services Finance Committee
Minnesota State Capitol
75 Rev Dr Martin Luther King Jr Blvd
St Paul, MN 55115



Dear Co-Chairs Noor and Schomaker and Members of the Committee,

I am writing to you as the Executive Director of Metro Meals on Wheels regarding the critical need for additional funding for senior nutrition programs in our state. As you are aware, the rising costs of food, housing and health care is resulting in a growing demand for home-delivered meals among seniors while our costs for food and transportation continue to rise. I urge you to support Senior Meals and Services, HF2212, an allocation of \$11 million in statewide funding in 2026 and 2027, to help address these challenges and provide much-needed assistance to vulnerable older adults in our community.

Meals on Wheels programs are a lifeline for many seniors, offering not only nutritious meals but also a daily connection to help combat loneliness and isolation. As the senior population continues to grow, so too does the demand for services, and many programs are faced with waiting lists due to limited resources. In our state, a significant number of seniors, particularly those living on fixed incomes, are unable to afford nutritious meals or are forced to choose between food and other basic necessities such as housing and healthcare. By increasing state funding, we would be able to expand meal delivery services, reduce waitlists, and ensure that our elderly population receives the care they need.

The proposed \$11 million in annual state funding would provide the resources needed to expand services, reduce waitlists, and better support seniors facing financial hardships. By increasing the capacity of Meals on Wheels programs, we can make sure that more seniors have access to nutritious meals and the support they need to remain independent and healthy in their homes.

I ask that you consider the profound impact this funding could have on the lives of seniors in our state. Together, we can help ensure that no senior is left behind, struggling with hunger and isolation.

Thank you for your time and attention to this important issue. I look forward to your support in ensuring that Meals on Wheels programs can meet the growing needs of our community's seniors.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Patrick Rowan", is written over a white background.

Patrick Rowan
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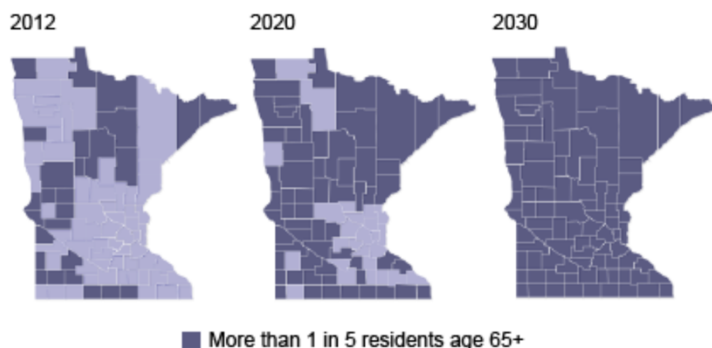
Meals that Matter: Funding Minnesota's Senior Nutrition Programs to Promote Wellbeing as We Age

Kelly Brancamp, MSW Candidate; Susan Panciera, MSW Candidate;
Amanda Rieke, BSSW, LSW, MSW Candidate; Abi Santiago, MSW Candidate
Minnesota State University, Mankato Department, of Social Work - March 2025

Value Proposition Statement

By ensuring adequate funding for Minnesota's senior nutrition programs, we will provide vital nutrition, promote socialization, and enhance the overall health and well-being of our seniors. Senior nutrition programs not only improve the quality of life for older adults but also reduce healthcare costs and the need for supportive care, benefiting the entire community.

Aging in Minnesota



(MN Compass)

Issue Statement

Senior nutrition programs meet the essential needs of adults aged 60 and over, especially those who are low-income, live in rural areas, have limited English proficiency and are at risk of requiring higher levels of care without these services. In many greater Minnesota counties, [over 25%](#) of the population is aged 65 or older. [Rural communities](#) are aging more rapidly and face higher rates of food insecurity compared to urban and suburban areas.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the US Surgeon General issued a [2023 advisory report](#) highlighting the critical issue of social isolation and loneliness. Senior [nutrition programs](#) play a dual role: they provide essential nutrition and address the emotional and social needs of program recipients. Additionally, these programs benefit volunteers by reducing loneliness, offering a sense of purpose and fostering community connections.

[Barriers to food security](#) for rural older adults include physical limitations, transportation challenges, financial constraints, social isolation and sociocultural factors. Addressing these barriers is crucial for the wellbeing and independence of our aging population. Robust support and expansion of senior nutrition programs will enable older adults to age in place, maintain social connections, and combat food insecurity, thereby benefiting the [entire community](#).

These policy recommendations are not endorsed by Minnesota State University, Mankato.

Explanation of Need

Nearly 7 million older adults in the United States are food insecure and [projections indicate](#) that more than 9 million could be food insecure by 2050. The Minnesota Association of Area Agencies on Aging (Mn4a) [defines](#) food insecurity as “the lack of enough affordable, nutritious food to live a healthy, active lifestyle.”

Food-insecure older adults are [more likely to be](#):

- Younger (age 60-64)
- Female
- Black, Indigenous, & People of Color
- Residents of Rural Areas
- Less educated
- Have a lower income



Consequences of Food Insecurity

Food insecurity among Minnesota’s older adults poses significant risks, leading to preventable physical and mental health conditions including:

- Malnutrition: [One in two](#) older adults are at risk of malnutrition.
- Susceptibility to [chronic disease](#): including Type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease and obesity.
- Poor mental health: food insecurity is associated with [increased stress](#) and depression.
- Lower cognitive function: raises the risk of dementia and other cognitive impairments
- Increased hospitalization and a higher need for costly supportive care
- Decreased [medication compliance](#): In the United States, food insecure older adults are six times more likely to not take medication as prescribed due to cost as those that were food secure.

Economic Impact

Older adults with health issues due to food insecurity [drive up costs](#) in various social services sectors. These costs include more expensive medical treatments, prolonged hospital stays and increased nursing home admissions. By [addressing food insecurity](#) we can reduce overall healthcare costs.

These policy recommendations are not endorsed by Minnesota State University, Mankato.

Current Policy Approaches

Federal Policy

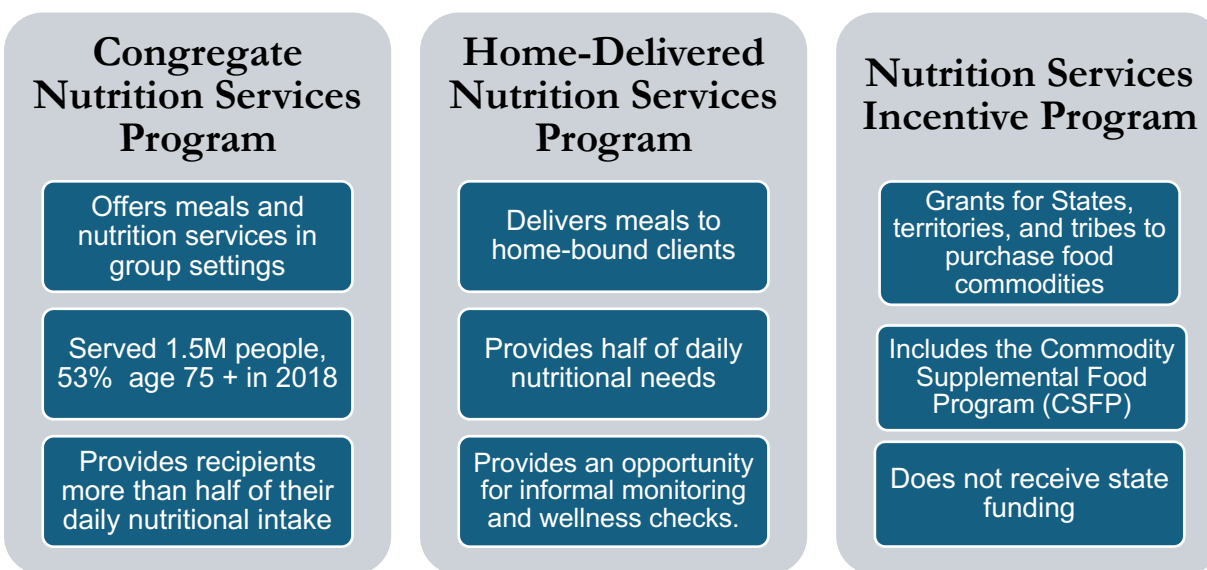
The Older Americans Act contains a nutrition program that provides grant funding to the states, who in turn administer nutrition services programs for seniors. Service providers must offer meals that meet established [dietary requirements](#) and participants must be over 60, the spouse of someone over 60, a person with a disability in a housing facility with mostly [older adults](#) or a volunteer who provides services.

The Older Americans Act nutrition program has three goals:

- Reduce hunger and food insecurity
- Promote socialization
- Promote health and wellbeing

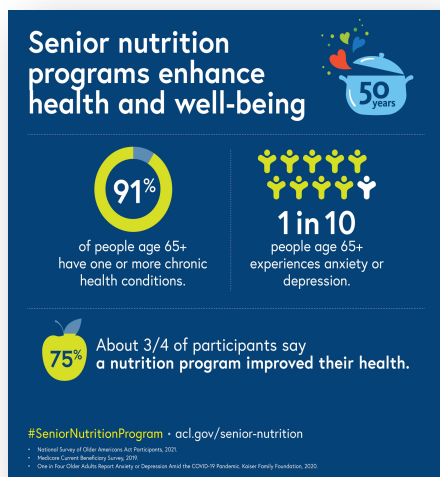
During the COVID-19 pandemic, federal funding for the [senior nutrition program](#) increased, which helped stabilize and even reduce food insecurity rates in some areas. The withdrawal of this funding will increase food insecurity for many Minnesotans.

The Federal Nutrition Program is split into [three State programs](#):



State Policy

Minnesota contributes \$2.695 million in funding split between the Congregate Nutrition Services Program and the Home-Delivered Nutrition Services Program. In 2023 the [Minnesota legislature](#) passed a one-time appropriation of \$11 million for senior meals, which Governor Walz signed into law. This was done in response to the end of increased federal funding received during the COVID-19 pandemic. This temporary increase of MN funds has also now ended, leaving limited options for older adults to [access healthy food](#).



Minnesota has not permanently increased funding for senior meals in over 20 years.

Policy Position Statement

Food prices have increased by more than 64% since 2004. By 2040, it is estimated that more than one quarter of all Minnesotans will be aged 65 or older. As Minnesota's older adult population grows and food costs continue to rise, the problem of food insecurity will be exacerbated. It is projected that 487,000 fewer meals will be provided for older adults in need in 2025 than in 2024.

Most older adults want to remain in their homes as long as possible. Senior nutrition programs are a vital resource to make aging in place a reality. By providing food assistance, Minnesota can drastically reduce the costs associated with aging. In 2020, one day spent in a long-term care facility cost \$363 per day while one day in the hospital was \$2410. Providing nutrition services for older adults can lead to significant financial savings.

Federal funding for senior nutrition programs has increased in dollar amounts from 2003-2021. However, when adjusted for inflation, funding has effectively decreased 8%. Due to the lack of funding, one organization reported a waitlist of 12,000 older adults for home-delivered meals. Federal funding and the modest state supplement is simply not enough to cover the need. Increasing funding in Minnesota is essential to address this issue and support our growing older adult population.

Recommendation

We urge the legislature to pass HF 2212/SF 2383, which calls for a funding increase of \$11,000,000 in fiscal year 2026 and \$11,000,000 in fiscal year 2027 for senior nutrition programs. We encourage future legislation to contain a permanent funding increase for senior nutrition that also includes funding for transportation needs and special services. Significant attention to this issue will ensure that all Minnesotans thrive as we age.

To access a digital version of this policy brief with links to citations, use this QR code:



SF 2383/HF 2212

Call to Action

Keep Minnesota seniors healthy and lower future costs

Frail Minnesota seniors are in urgent need of your help. One in two older adults is at risk for malnutrition ([Defeat Malnutrition Today](#)) and many lack access to transportation for crucial appointments and connections. Support services can make the difference between older adults living independently and safely in their homes and needing more expensive institutional care.

The Coalition is asking legislators to support older adults with:

- \$11 million biennial appropriation to **meet minimum nutritional needs**.
- \$2 million biennial appropriation to **address transportation needs**.
- \$2 million biennial appropriation to **provide support services**, including assisted transportation, homemaker services and outdoor chores.



Programs that provide meals and other services for older adults are severely underfunded and do not meet the needs of Minnesota's oldest residents.

Lowering future costs for taxpayers

According to the Minnesota Department of Human Services, annual government payments for long-term services and supports for older adults are projected to grow 71% from 2023-2035.

The services and support provided through the aging network — a national network of federal, state, tribal and local agencies — are some of the most cost-effective ways to support older adults. The services are targeted to frail older adults with low incomes or living in rural areas, often both.



SENIOR MEALS & SERVICES COALITION

Pass SF 2383/HF 2212

Contact your Senators and Representatives and urge their support for this bipartisan legislation.

For the latest updates, visit

seniorservicesmn.org

Contacts

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What you need to know

- The [Minnesota Association of Area Agencies on Aging](#) projects that **487,000 fewer meals** will be available to older adults in 2025 than in 2024. As the aging population grows, the shortfall will reach catastrophic levels.
- Access to **healthy food is a key element of health**. Poor nutrition is associated with obesity, chronic diseases and increased stress. It erodes the quality of life for older adults and increases healthcare costs.
- In 2023, the legislature passed and Governor Walz signed a one-time appropriation of \$11 million for senior meals. **The coalition is now asking the legislature to continue that support with an ongoing appropriation.**
- **Other sources for healthy food are drying up.** The minimum SNAP benefit for an older adult dropped from the COVID-era sum of \$281 per month to just \$23 (Food Research and Action Center). People aged 60+ are the fastest-growing segment of food shelf users.

- Many older adults need transportation to get to doctors' appointments, do grocery shopping and stay connected with friends and family. Without transportation, older adults are at risk for social isolation, hurting physical and mental health. **Additional dollars are needed to meet the growing demand for transportation, particularly in rural Minnesota communities.**
- For aging adults who have become frail, even small tasks can become difficult. Assisted transportation and homemaker and chore services can **provide essential support that helps seniors maintain their dignity, health and independence.**

We need your help!

Will you fight to meet the need for senior meals and services? Help us pass SF 2383/HF 2212 to meet this urgent and growing need.

Learn more and get latest updates at:

seniorservicesmn.org

Join us in raising awareness
of the need to fund
senior meals and services.



MINNESOTA ASSOCIATION OF
AREA AGENCIES ON AGING

This advocacy effort is convened by the Minnesota Association of Area Agencies on Aging. A voice for older adults in Minnesota.



AARP Testimony for HF 2212
House of Representatives Human Services Finance and Policy Committee
April 2, 2025

Dear Co-Chairs Schomacker, Noor, and Members of the Committee,

AARP supports H.F. 2212 which increases state senior nutrition program funding. This funding would reduce food insecurity and poverty and would improve health outcomes, including reduced hospitalizations among low-income older adults.

AARP has repeatedly called on state lawmakers to support senior nutrition programs and urges you to pass additional funding this year. Due to inflation, the cost of food and gas, utilities, and supplies has increased between 10% to 40%, making it even more difficult for older Minnesotans to afford meals.

The benefits of passing increased funding for the senior nutrition program:

- Decreases the rate of Minnesotans seniors who are in food insecurity
- Addresses the growing concern toward increased health emergencies
- Helps Minnesotans afford necessities such as prescription drugs, housing, and utilities
- Passing legislation that promotes an increase in funding for the senior nutrition program is essential in promoting the health and well-being of all Minnesotans

This investment would be life-changing for older Minnesotans experiencing an array of uncertainty and food insecurity. Nutritional adequacy for vulnerable Americans must be ensured, including those who have limited or no capacity to buy, prepare, and store food. For these reasons, AARP asks for your support of HF 2212.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony.

Thomas Elness
State Advocacy Director
AARP Minnesota



**SENIOR MEALS &
SERVICES COALITION**

Supporting Organizations: Senior Meals and Services

S.F. 2383 / H.F. 2212

Aitkin County CARE, Inc.	Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota
Arrowhead Area Agency on Aging	Meals on Wheels of Ramsey County
Arrowhead Economic Opportunity Agency (AEOA)	Metro Meals on Wheels
Benedictine Living Community Cold Spring	Minneapolis American Indian Center
CAPI USA	Minnesota Community Action Partnership
Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Saint Cloud	Minnesota Leadership Council on Aging
Catholic Charities Twin Cities	Minnesota River Area Agency on Aging (MNRAAA)
Central Community Transit	Minnesota Social Service Association
Central Minnesota Council on Aging	Mower County Seniors, Inc.
Community Partners	NewTrax
Dancing Sky Area Agency on Aging	Nutrition Services, Inc.
Elder Network	Open Arms of Minnesota
Essential Senior Services, Inc.	Optage Meals
Faith in Action for Cass County	Paynesville Area Living at Home/Block Nurse Program
Family Pathways	Prairie Five Community Action Council, Inc.
Family Service Rochester	Semcac
Help at Your Door	Senior Community Services
Jewish Family and Children's Service of Minneapolis	SEWA-AIFW
Korean Service Center	Southeastern Minnesota Area Agency on Aging (SEMAAA)
Lao Advancement Organization of America	Three Rivers Community Action, Inc.



SENIOR MEALS & SERVICES COALITION

Touchstone Mental Health

Trellis

TRUST Incorporated

United Cambodian Association of
Minnesota

Volunteers of America Minnesota

Waseca Area Caregiver Services

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