



Serving Detroit, Hamtramck,
Harper Woods, Highland Park
and the five Grosse Pointes

Detroit Area Agency on Aging

Home Delivered Meals Program

More than Just a Meal, It's an Investment

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INTRODUCTION

The Meals on Wheels/Home Delivered Meals (HDM) Program for the homebound elderly is widely recognized as a valued service that assists homebound older adults to maintain proper nutrition, health and independent living. However, the actual value of the program extends far beyond just the delivery of a nutritious meal, and achieves many important but largely unknown outcomes that positively impact participants, family members, and public expenditures for the care of the elderly. Michigan's federally and state-funded HDM provider network delivers high quality meals that meet consumer expectations and offer value-added benefits at an exceptionally low cost.

In the United States, more than 15.2 million seniors live in isolation, 18.4 million live at or below the poverty level and more than 10 million seniors struggle with hunger every day or at the end of the month. This perfect storm provided the impetus for the creation of the nation's Home Delivered Meals Program which is administered by the Administration for Community Living and funded under the Older Americans Act. For over 45 years, this program has grown to about 5,000 nutrition service providers together serving over 900,000 meals a day in communities all across the country. These HDM Programs are complemented by Congregate Meals Programs that serve meals at noon time at public facilities. Both programs are funded by state and local government funds, foundations, private pay, fundraising, program participant voluntary contributions and other sources. Many programs only operate five days a week and provide one to two meals per day and do not provide meals on holidays because of limitations in funding.

HOME DELIVERED MEAL SERVICE NEEDS

Recent data from the National Survey of Older Americans Act participants illustrates how the Home Delivered Meals programs are effectively targeting services. A participant profile found the following characteristics:

- 69% of individuals served by this program are 75 years or older
- The average age of a participant is 79 years of age

- More than 60% of participants indicate that the single home delivered meal provides one-half or more of their total food for the day
- 91% of participants indicate that the Home Delivered Meals program helps them to stay in their own home
- More than half of all participants live alone

Michigan Area Agencies on Aging and Senior Nutrition Providers are concerned about growing pressure to continue reducing public funding and the increasing demand for Home Delivered Meal Services.

DAAA HOME DELIVERED MEALS PROGRAM

Detroit Area Agency on Aging (DAAA), a nonprofit organization with a mission to educate, advocate, and promote healthy aging, provides approximately 2,500 meals daily primarily to homebound seniors, 60 years of age or older and disabled adults in the Detroit, the five Grosse Pointes, Harper Woods, Hamtramck, and Highland Park. In FY 2016, over 2,500 homebound seniors received 600,000 meals at an approximate cost of \$3,000,000. A reduction in funding would make a more tenuous circumstance even worst. Utilizing a projected funding reduction budget, over 400 participants would go back on the waiting list and no longer receive a meal. Fifty Veterans would be cut from the program.

Funding reductions to the DAAA's Meals on Wheels Program will present a significant challenge in providing meals to our current participants. Currently, DAAA HDM program serves 2,500 participants Monday through Friday.

Key demographics about these participants are as follows:

- More than 600 seniors are females who live alone. This accounts for 31% of all participants.
- The average age of the DAAA home delivered meals participant is 77 years old.
- There are currently 136 participants that are over the age of 90 years. This accounts for 7% of all program participants.

- About 482 participants are living with incomes at 100% of the Department of Health and Human Services Federal Poverty guidelines. Those living below poverty accounts for 53% of program participants.
- Two hundred (200) of the HDM participants are Veterans.

The Detroit Area Agency on Aging (DAAA) has operated its Monday through Friday Home Delivered Meals (HDM) Program since 1980 and also has a supplemental Holiday Meals on Wheels (HMOW) Program that serves homebound seniors on four holidays (Thanksgiving, Christmas, Easter and Labor Day). These critically needed services are offered to at-risk, homebound seniors to address a variety of needs including:

- Reducing hunger and food insecurity among older persons,
- Promoting socialization of older persons,
- Promoting the health and well-being of seniors; and
- Delaying adverse health conditions and premature death.

The daily HDM Program provides access to healthy meals, nutrition education and limited nutrition counseling with support from Title III-C of the Older Americans Act, state and private funding.

DAAA HOME DELIVERED MEALS WAITLIST

Unfortunately the need to provide meals to the elderly continues to grow. There are currently 1,500 elderly on the DAAA waitlist for the daily meals program. Sixty individuals on the waitlist are Veterans. In order to serve the individuals on the waitlist the DAAA would need additional funding in the amount of approximately \$9,000 per day which equates to \$2,200,000.00 annually. The average wait time in 2016 was 110 days. Between May 2016 and March 2017, 34 people have died while waiting for meals through the HDM Program.

THE VALUE OF HOME DELIVERED MEALS OUTCOMES

Numerous studies have documented the benefits of the home delivered meals program because of its ability to improve nutrition for older adults and also reduce the risk of poor

health outcomes associated with aging and malnutrition. Since appetite and the body's ability to process food may decrease with age while health conditions and use of medications affect nutrition status, the delivery of home delivered meals is critical. The limited ability to shop for and prepare food can affect a person's access to it. Factors like isolation and depression also can affect nutrition. Malnutrition may lead to poor health in older adults. Fortunately, the delivery of meals, when coupled with the assessment process and nutrition education provides opportunities for seniors to improve their nutrition status.

A new national study commissioned by Meals on Wheels America in conjunction with the AARP Foundation and conducted by researchers at Brown University Center for Gerontology and Healthcare Research validates what AAAs and nutrition service providers have known all along - that the HDM Program positively impacts the quality of life of participants. This study, released this month and conducted in the winter of 2013 and spring of 2014, set out to demonstrate the effectiveness of Home Delivered Meals.

The findings from the study overwhelmingly support the value of daily home delivered meals as the most beneficial and successful model of meal delivery for homebound older adults. The results were derived from responses to an extensive questionnaire conducted with 626 individuals receiving services from Meals on Wheels organizations in eight states across the country. The most significant findings are summarized below:

- Those who received daily delivered meals experienced the greatest improvements in health and quality of life.
- Respondents receiving daily delivered meals were more likely to exhibit improvements in mental health (i.e., anxiety); improvements in self-rated health; reductions in the rate of falls; improvements in feelings of isolation and loneliness; and decreases in worry about being able to remain in their homes.
- They also were more likely to attribute their meals to making them feel safer and report that their meals helped them to eat healthier foods than the group receiving frozen meals.

- Delays premature nursing home admissions and hospital readmissions.
- Daily, home delivered meals provide an array of benefits that result in cost savings in the long run because they help keep people independent, health and happy in their own homes instead of in expensive institutional or health care settings.

Other research studies have uncovered benefits of the HDM program:

- Zhu and An recently conducted a review of eight studies on home delivered meals programs and found that the services significantly improved diet quality, nutrient intake, and reduced food insecurity and nutritional risk among participants.

On March 17, 2017, the MQII: Malnutrition Quality Improvement Initiative Toolkit was released to advance evidence-based, high quality and patient-driven care for hospitalized older adults who are malnourished or at risk of malnutrition. The project, developed by a team of dietitians, physicians, nurses and other health professionals found the following:

- Malnutrition is a leading cause of morbidity and mortality, especially among older adults. Between 20 – 50% of patients are at risk of malnutrition or already malnourished upon hospital admission.
- Malnutrition increases hospital length of stay by 4 to 6 days and (increases) costs by up to 300 percent.

CONCLUSION

Findings from national and local studies provide evidence that HDM programs can positively impact physical and mental health status and quality of life. It is important for federal, state and local resources to be targeted to this program. The HDM Program improves health status and reduces unnecessary healthcare cost. This calls for community partners to bring together funding and other resources to meet the needs of the community's most vulnerable citizens. Home delivered meals is more than a meal,

it's an investment in the lives of seniors who have contributed so much to our community.