

# Report to the Board of Supervisors



## Home Delivery of Meals to Seniors/Disabled in Santa Barbara County

Prepared by the Department of Social Services  
August 23, 2022



**SOCIAL SERVICES**

HEALTH

SECURITY

SAFETY

## **Intent**

The intent of this report is to convey to the Board of Supervisors information about the large array of meal services provided to seniors and the disabled by the nine nonprofit programs that have been identified as providing this service in the County. In several of these programs, meal delivery services are a component of a larger system of supportive services provided to seniors, including information & referral, counseling, assistance with appointment scheduling and local transportation, and application assistance for health care benefits, energy assistance, housing or other community resources.

## **Method**

A survey was created by the Department of Social Services and administered by the Division Chief responsible for the Adult Protective Services and IHSS programs. The questions were designed to elicit specific information regarding: the number of clients served; eligibility criteria for home delivered meals; use of volunteer or paid drivers; cost per meal; donation requested per meal; how meals were prepared; types and number of meals delivered weekly; and organizational budget information in FY 21/22. The leadership of the programs and/or those they designated within their programs, provided much of the information presented in this report.

## **Context**

It is important to understand the current state of senior/disabled home delivered meal programs within the context of the Covid Pandemic, which eliminated meals at congregate meal sites and which caused many seniors (aged 60+) and disabled individuals who had otherwise not been participating in any meal program, or who had been participating in congregate meal programs, to be in need of home delivered meals as they isolated in their homes and avoided going to restaurants and grocery stores.

The current Public Health Emergency has been extended by the federal government to October 13, 2022, so it is not anticipated that any congregate meals programs will be returning until after that time, though that is up to each program and their ability to re-establish such sites.

## **What We Learned**

We identified nine non-profit programs in our county providing home delivered meals to seniors and the disabled. They vary in terms of: how many times per week they deliver; how many meals they deliver to each client each week; whether they deliver hot meals, bagged meals, frozen meals or refrigerated meals; what their suggested donation is per meal from their clients; whether they utilize volunteer or paid drivers - or a combination of both; how they fundraise or otherwise secure the money to run their programs beyond client donations; how they obtain the food that is delivered; how they determine the geographic areas they serve; and how they identify who is eligible for their assistance.

The below charts attempt to summarize the information we gathered:

**Table 1 - Summary of Clients/Meals served per Week and Meal Type**

Total Programs Responding	Total Clients Served	Total Meals Served	Programs Serving Hot Meals	Programs Serving Refrigerated Meals	Programs Serving Bagged Meals
9	2,419	8,850	7	3	5

**Table 2 - Summary of Cost per Meal and Client Donation**

Range of Cost per Meal	Average Cost per Meal by Program	Range of Suggested Client Donation
\$3.50 - \$15	\$7.66	\$0 - \$10

**Table 3 - Summary of Annual Funding Sources from the 6 Programs that Provided Complete Information (as reported by the programs)**

Federal Funds	State/City Funds	County Funds	Client Donation	Fundraising	Charitable Donations	Unspecified	Total Funds
\$432,060	\$818,867	\$137,500	\$374,003	\$146,586	\$583,498	\$574,358	\$3,066,872

**Table 4 - Summary of Meal Preparation and Delivery Method**

Meals Prepared by Organization	Meals Prepared by Contractor	Meals Delivered Exclusively by Paid Drivers	Meals Delivered Exclusively by Volunteer Drivers	Meals Delivered by Paid and Volunteer Drivers
4	5	1	5	3

--	--	--	--	--

**Table 5 - Meal Delivery Programs Receiving Human Services Commission  
(General Fund) - Funds in Current Fiscal Year**

<b>Agency &amp; Program Name</b>	<b>Funds Requested</b>	<b>Funds Awarded</b>	<b>Service Area</b>	<b>Population Served</b>	<b>Description of Service</b>
Santa Barbara Meals on Wheels	\$16,000	\$16,000	Santa Barbara Area	Seniors	Meal delivery to seniors
Santa Maria Valley - Meals on Wheels	\$35,000	\$30,000	Santa Maria & Orcutt	Seniors	Meal delivery to seniors
Santa Ynez Valley Senior Citizens Foundation (Buellton Senior Center) Senior Nutrition*	\$50,000	\$0	Santa Ynez Valley and Lompoc	Seniors	Meal delivery to seniors
Organic Soup Kitchen	\$25,000	\$20,000	Countywide (expanding to Santa Maria as of 2022)	Seniors, particularly cancer patients	Meal delivery to seniors, with an emphasis on cancer patients and immunocompromised individuals

\* \$35,000 provided from General Fund allocated to 3<sup>rd</sup> district as a result of decisions made at the 6/14/22 Budget Hearings.

**Table 6 - Meal Delivery Programs Receiving Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) - Funds in Current Fiscal Year**

Agency & Program Name	Funds Requested	Funds Awarded	Service Area	Population Served	Description of Service
Santa Maria Valley (FISH) - Meals on Wheels	\$25,000	\$15,947	Santa Maria & Orcutt	Seniors	Meal delivery to seniors
Organic Soup Kitchen	\$25,000	\$0	Countywide (expanding to Santa Maria as of 2022)	Seniors, particularly cancer patients	Meal delivery to seniors, with an emphasis on cancer patients and immunocompromised individuals

**Table 7 - Meal Delivery Programs Receiving DSS (General Fund) - Funds in Current Fiscal Year**

Agency & Program Name	Funds Requested	Funds Awarded	Service Area	Population Served	Description of Service
Area Agency on Aging (AAA)	\$50,000	\$50,000	Countywide	Seniors and Disabled	Administrative match that is required to draw down Older Americans Act funding used for congregate and home delivered meals, supportive services, and family caregiver support programs.

## What the Revenue Figures Don't Capture

- Looking at revenues alone does not capture the value of volunteer staff, volunteer drivers and program participants who volunteer their time for other organizations in order to have meals donated to their own organization.
- Because the programs that do apply a sliding scale for participants to determine a suggested donation do not refuse service if that suggested donation is not made; and because programs receiving federal Older American Act funding are not allowed to ask about income, the amounts received from those served does not reflect their income or ability to pay.
- All of the programs contacted reported an ongoing challenge obtaining the funds necessary to serve their populations. So, even though there is only a waiting list with one program currently, that is not a sign of financial stability or the ability to handle a higher number of program participants.

## Additional Nutritional Resources

### **FoodBank of Santa Barbara County**

The FOODBANK of Santa Barbara County provides fresh produce, dairy and other foods to low-income seniors. In addition to all the distribution sites countywide, volunteers assemble over 4,000 bags of assorted food items a week for delivery to seniors. Santa Barbara County Foodbank also provides fresh food to its partner agencies who prepare and cook meals.

### **The Wisdom Center**

The Wisdom Center is a For-Profit, Licensed Health Care Facility working to serve the whole person through nutritious delivered or on site home cooked meals, nursing staff who provide professional physical health care, social services providing cognitive and emotional support or connections to community resources, Physical/Occupational and Speech Therapy, as well as member engagement through weekly stimulating activity packets (art, gardening, knitting) and transportation to and from their home. Services are currently being provided on site in Santa Maria, to include Breakfast, Lunch and a snack with engagement. Those clients who are not able to come to the center may receive a meal service in their own home if purchased. Services are available to members through private pay or whom are funded through CenCal CBAS (Community Based Adult Services) or the Veterans Administration. The goal is to assist community members to remain living in their home, support caregivers, and reduce feelings of isolation.

## Limitations/Challenges for Recipients

The following are some of the limitations and challenges the recipients of meals experience which may lessen the intended impact of these programs:

- Inability to manage the food delivered for several days due to refrigeration capacity.
- Lack of financial resources and/or energy efficient appliances causing a recipient to let their frozen meal to sit on the counter until it is thawed and then eating it at room temperature.
- Cognitive limitations of some recipients to remember to utilize any food not delivered hot and immediately consumed.
- Physical limitations such as arthritis or dexterity problems of some recipients to manage the food containers and to heat up refrigerated meals.
- The reality that not all meals are going to be appealing to all recipients and to the extent that a meal isn't eaten or only partially eaten, the nutritional value is lost or diminished.
- Some people's inability to eat all of the portion provided in one sitting and who may struggle with wasting food by throwing it out, therefore they order fewer meals.
- Cognitive impaired clients who have had their stoves either removed and/or turned off or buttons removed, are reliant on a third party to warm them up, which may or may not happen regularly.
- Blind or visually impaired individuals who rely on other senses to identify foods could be challenged in knowing what the food is and wanting to eat it.
- Major shift in human connections when the Covid pandemic began as many programs went from visiting and setting up meals, to a 'knock, listen and drop', to address health and safety risks. For many individuals the socialization was what they looked forward to. One example shared by an Executive Director: Client called a program and asked if they were going to continue dropping items off and then leaving; when told yes, he became frustrated and told them they didn't need to come.

### **Waiting Lists**

Our survey revealed that only one program had a small waiting list. However, all the programs we spoke to addressed the fragility of their various funding sources and their ongoing efforts to have the funds and resources to serve anyone in need.

### **Future State Issues and Current Unknowns**

When the Public Health Emergency and the waiver allowing federal Older Americans Act funds to be used to serve home delivered meals to people who do not have deficiencies in the activities of daily living end, many individuals now receiving a meal will have to go to a congregate meal site, if those sites are available.

Some of the individuals currently served, while not having deficits in the activities of daily living, will still have barriers related to transportation that will keep them from accessing any congregate meal sites that might be re-established.

It is not known if the programs that previously had congregate meal sites will be able to re-establish those when the Public Health Emergency comes to an end.

## Conclusion

The past two and a half years of the pandemic have skewed the picture of services that would have been painted prior to March of 2020, or that will re-emerge after the Public Health Emergency is lifted. However, the Covid pandemic did put a spotlight on the food insecurity issues of many in our community, including seniors and the disabled. Santa Barbara County has an array of providers addressing the nutritional needs of seniors and the disabled in a variety of ways. These organizations and those working/volunteering for these organizations are passionate and committed to serving those in need in their various communities.

Recognition of programs for providing information:

1. Central Coast Commission for Senior Citizens - Area Agency on Aging
2. Meals On Wheels Lompoc
3. Santa Barbara Meals On Wheels
4. Meals On Wheels Santa Maria Valley
5. Atterdag at Home Meals On Wheels
6. Organic Soup Kitchen
7. Santa Ynez People Helping People
8. Santa Ynez Valley Citizen Foundation
9. Food From The Heart