

5 Facts About ‘Meals on Wheels’ Funding

What’s the story?

Numerous media outlets have falsely reported that the Trump administration proposed 2018 budget would eliminate charities like Meals on Wheels. The reports also claimed that White House budget director Mick Mulvaney had said during a press conference that Meals on Wheels “doesn’t work.” (Representative headlines included *Time*’s “Trump’s Budget Would Kill a Program That Feeds 2.4 Million Senior Citizens” and Slate’s article: “Trump’s budget director says Meals on Wheels doesn’t work.”)

What is “Meals on Wheels”?

Meals on Wheels is a name that refers to two different entities: 1. The approximately 5,000 independently-run local community programs called Meals on Wheels, whose function is to provide nutritious meals to homebound seniors as well as safety checks and human connection, and 2. Meals on Wheels America, a national membership organization that does not provide direct services (i.e., meals).

Did the White House budget director say Meals on Wheels “doesn’t work”?

No. Mulvaney said that Community Development Block Grants (CDBGs), a program administered by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), were identified as “just not showing any results” and that the \$3 billion should be spent on other budget items.

Some states use CDBG money for Meals on Wheels. However, HUD doesn’t know how much of that money ultimately goes to that program. As *USA Today* notes, “It’s certainly a small fraction:

Social services are capped by law at 15 percent of the block grants, and the most recent HUD figures show all senior services receive about \$33 million.”

Even the liberal activist magazine *Mother Jones* contends that Mulvaney’s words were taken out of context:

Mulvaney, obviously, wasn’t saying that Meals on Wheels doesn’t work. He was saying that CDBGs don’t work. Meals on Wheels might be great, but community grants aren’t, and he wants to eliminate them. But by smushing together three quotes delivered at three different points, it sounds like Mulvaney was gleefully killing off food for the elderly. ... Someone managed to plant this idea with reporters, and more power to them. Good job! But reporters ought to be smart enough not to fall for it.

Is it true that Meals on Wheels only receives 3 percent of its funding from the federal government?

Yes and no. Meals on Wheels America (MOWA), the national membership organization, says it receives only 3 percent of its \$7.9 million dollar budget from the federal government (approximately \$239,347). In comparison, MOWA paid its top six employees a total compensation of \$1,065,344, including \$304,758 to the nonprofit’s CEO.

MOWA says that “in the aggregate” local Meals on Wheels programs receive 35 percent of their funding directly from the federal government.

Will direct federal funding for local Meals on Wheels programs be cut?

Unclear, though unlikely.

The direct funding for Meals on Wheels programs comes from the Nutrition Service Programs, administered by the Administration on Aging within the Administration for Community Living of the

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services under the Older Americans Act. In 2015, the program gave U.S. states, territories, and tribal groups a total of \$224,673,820 for home meals.

President Trump's budget proposal proposes to cut the Department of Health and Human Services by 16 percent. It is unknown whether any part of this reduction will include the Nutrition Service Programs, which helps to fund Meals on Wheels. Additionally, Congress could direct the funding for this program not be reduced or eliminated.

Some local organizations also gain additional funding Community Services Block Grant (CSBG), Social Services Block Grant (SSBG), Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) and Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP). There is currently no evidence that any of these programs are being cut or that their budget reductions would affect Meals on Wheels programs. {eo}

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