

From: s47F
 To: s47F
 Subject: FW: Meals on Wheels Services in Victoria at serious risk of collapse [SEC=OFFICIAL]
 Date: Wednesday, 13 September 2023 4:36:00 PM
 Attachments: [mealsonwheels.org.au](#)
[Signed MP Senator Letter.pdf](#)
[QoH 2022 .pdf](#)
[QoH 2023 .pdf](#)
[Meals-on-Wheels-Victoria-Special-Report-February-2023 \(3\).pdf](#)

Hello

Can I please request for following for this enquiry –

- M-response to come to me
- QTB update

Thanks

s47F

From: s47F
 Sent: Wednesday, 13 September 2023 4:12 PM
 To: s47F <@Health.gov.au>
 Cc: Minister Wells <Minister.Wells@Health.gov.au>
 Subject: FW: Meals on Wheels Services in Victoria at serious risk of collapse [SEC=OFFICIAL]

Hey

Looking for some direction here? Normally I would just say a D-response but they have sent this to our Victorian senators and they are asking for how they can respond.

From: s47F (Sen R. Ciccone) <s47F@aph.gov.au>
 Sent: Wednesday, 13 September 2023 2:26 PM
 To: s47F <@Health.gov.au>
 Subject: FW: Meals on Wheels Services in Victoria at serious risk of collapse

H s47F

I hope this email finds you well.

As the attached letter has been sent to all Victorian MPs and Senator s47C

Kind regards



s47F
 Office of Senator Raff Ciccone
 Deputy Government Whip in the Senate
 Federal Labor Senator for Victoria
 1A Blackburn Road, Blackburn VIC 3130
 EO s47F / PH s47F / E s47F @aph.gov.au
Senator.Raff.Ciccone@aph.gov.au

From: s47F <@mealsonwheelsvictoria.org.au>
 Sent: Monday, August 7, 2023 8:50 AM
 Subject: Meals on Wheels Services in Victoria at serious risk of collapse

Dear Victorian MPs/ Senators

Please find attached a letter from Meals on Wheels Victoria (with relevant attachments) on behalf of our members outlining some serious concerns regarding funding for meals on wheels services in Victoria and the federally funded Future Fit Program.

Yours sincerely

s47F

MOWV

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 THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, DISABILITY AND AGEING
 UNDER THE FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT 1989



Meals on Wheels Victoria

7 August 2023

Dear Victorian MP/ Senator,

I am writing to you on behalf of Meals on Wheels Victoria (MOWV) and our members.

Recently it was announced that Meals on Wheels Queensland would receive funding to run the Meals on Wheels Service for Ballarat and Meals on Wheels Newcastle (NSW) would receive funding to run the Meals on Wheels Service for Whitehorse. The first MOWV Victoria knew of this was from the below media release.

<https://www.health.gov.au/ministers/the-hon-anika-wells-mp/media/delivering-over-150000-meals-to-older-victorians-living-at-home>

These two interstate services will be receiving \$13 per unit under the CHSP program for provision of a meal (a unit). The majority of Victorian MOW Services currently receive just \$8.25 per unit. This is a major disparity. Minister Butler and the Department of Health and Aged Care claim the \$13 per unit includes money for infrastructure and set up costs (see attached answers to recent Questions on Notice at Senate Estimates), however there is no information forthcoming about how \$13 per unit was arrived at. There are several other providers who have had set up and infrastructure costs who have not been funded at \$13 per unit.

Further to this, no open tender process was undertaken in the awarding of this funding to two interstate services, despite there being current CHSP services in Victoria who could have tendered for and provided this service.

Victoria already has many Councils who have exited from providing Meals on Wheels Service, and it is feared this disparity will lead to more Councils exiting provision of Meals on Wheels.

I would also like to bring to your attention the awarding of \$7.05 million contract over two years to consultants – Miles Morgan Australia- for a “*Business Transition Project for Meals on Wheels Australia*”. <https://www.tenders.gov.au/Cn/Show/94e8f9c2-8bb6-4a91-b873-3a02fb493db4>

Currently these consultants are only engaging with Meals on Wheels Queensland and have refused to engage with Meals on Wheels Australia, Meals on Wheels Victoria and the other state Peak Bodies.

This is a significant amount of taxpayers' money to only engage with one State, and has also been shrouded in secrecy. Given the recent issues that have presented themselves around use of consultants in the federal public service, this should be of concern to you as an elected representative.

I have attached a recent report that MOWV authored that shows the current risks to Meals on Wheels in this state. I would welcome an opportunity to meet with you about the above issues and the issues outlined in the report.

s47F



MOWV

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SENATE QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Question Number: 2002
Date Asked: 20 April 2023
Tabling Due Date: 20 May 2023

Question:

SENATOR Anne Ruston asked the Minister for Health and Aged Care, upon notice, on 20 April 2023:

With reference to this announcement: <https://www.health.gov.au/ministers/the-hon-anika-wells-mp/media/delivering-over-150000-meals-to-older-victorians-living-at-home>

- Why was Meals on Wheels Victoria not consulted regarding this pilot program.
- Who will be providing the meals and in what format.
- Were current local food supply/distribution businesses given an opportunity to participate.
- What is the costing of each meal.
- Will this program be following the Meals on Wheels Victoria Best Practice Guidelines 2022; and if not, can the best practise guidelines be provided.
- How does this differ to the current arrangement with Meals on Wheels Victoria.

Answer:

Minister Butler – The answer to the honourable senator's question is as follows:

- *Why was Meals on Wheels Victoria not consulted regarding this pilot program.*

Peak organisations and other third parties are not usually engaged when managing the impact of a Commonwealth Home Support Programme (CHSP) provider relinquishing service delivery. This is because the process involves commercial in-confidence discussions between the Department of Health and Aged Care (the department) and potential incoming CHSP providers (noting that incoming providers are drawn from the existing pool of CHSP providers, in line with grant rules).

- *Who will be providing the meals and in what format.*

As a pilot program, the providers are currently in the process of establishing necessary arrangements to deliver meals in these locations, and are working closely with the two councils in relation to existing infrastructure that can be leveraged. Under CHSP, the department does not dictate these arrangements, only that services must adhere to requirements under the CHSP program manual.

However, the department expects that meals will be provided in line with the Meals on Wheels ethos, including the retention of volunteers and social support.

- *Were current local food supply/distribution businesses given an opportunity to participate.*
In line with grant rules, only currently funded CHSP providers are eligible to accept contracts to deliver meals services.

- *What is the costing of each meal.*

The pilots are funded to deliver outputs based on a Government subsidised unit price of \$13.00. While within the CHSP unit price range for meals, this price is reflective of higher than average costs involved with establishing new infrastructure.

CHSP providers are also expected to charge a client contribution on top of the unit price range to ensure the sustainability of the service. CHSP providers determine their own client contribution charge in consultation with clients. The total meal costs differ according to the model of delivery, location, staffing and food choice.

- *Will this program be following the Meals on Wheels Victoria Best Practice Guidelines 2022; and if not, can the best practise guidelines be provided.*

All CHSP meals providers are expected to adhere to relevant Commonwealth and/or state/territory legislation and regulations, including safe food handling practices and national meals guidelines.

Beyond those formal requirements, the use of the *Meals on Wheels Victoria Best Practice Guidelines 2022* is subject to the ordinary governance requirements for operating a meals on wheels branded entity in Victoria.

- *How does this differ to the current arrangement with Meals on Wheels Victoria.*

The pilot program does not impact current arrangements with *Meals on Wheels Victoria*. The aim of the pilot is to test the deployment of new meals on wheels outlets in areas where meals on wheels is traditionally delivered by local councils. Absent the pilot and in line with historical decisions, existing CHSP providers in, or near, those council locations would likely have been selected. This most likely would not have delivered services under the meals on wheels ethos.

SENATE QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Question Number: 2003
Date Asked: 20 April 2023
Tabling Due Date: 20 May 2023

Question:

SENATOR Anne Ruston asked the Minister for Health and Aged Care upon notice, on 20 April 2023:

With reference to this announcement: <https://www.health.gov.au/ministers/the-hon-anika-wells-mp/media/delivering-over-150000-meals-to-older-victorians-living-at-home>

- What is the breakdown of how the \$2.2 million will be expended.
- Over how many financial years will the \$2.2 million be expended.
- Can the tender process be detailed, including:
 - if it was an open or closed tender process; and
 - the relevant link to the tender as published on AusTender.
- How were the two councils chosen.
- Why were only two councils chosen.

Answer:

Minister Butler – The answer to the honourable senator's question is as follows:

- *What is the breakdown of how the \$2.2 million will be expended.*

Newcastle Meals on Wheels has been funded for \$1.133 million (GST exclusive) and Queensland Meals on Wheels funded for \$837,000 (GST exclusive). The total funding of \$2.2 million includes GST.

- *Over how many financial years will the \$2.2 million be expended.*

Commonwealth Home Support Programme (CHSP) providers have a 12-month grant agreement to expend their funds.

- *Can the tender process be detailed, including:*
 - *if it was an open or closed tender process; and*
 - *the relevant link to the tender as published on AusTender.*

The Department of Health and Aged Care undertook a standard direct selection as part of the relinquishment process, driven by these Councils relinquishing CHSP services from 1 July 2023. Incoming providers are selected from existing CHSP providers, to ensure continuity of services when a provider exits the program.

- *How were the two councils chosen.*

As part of the direct selection process, CHSP meals providers with the necessary capacity and capability were reviewed and selected.

- *Why were only two councils chosen.*

The outcome of the direct selection process is based on provider capacity, proven performance and ability to deploy new infrastructure for continuity of services within the available timeframe.

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Meals on Wheels
Victoria

(registered as Victorian Meals on Wheels Association Incorporated)
I No. A0045532C ABN: 14 067 381 838

Meals on Wheels Victoria

Special Report

Meals on Wheels in Victoria on verge of collapse

State Association warnings prove correct

This report was compiled on behalf the Meals on Wheels Victoria Association by the State Manager
15 February 2023

contact@mealsonwheelsvictoria.org.au

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Introduction

Meals on Wheels services are in danger of disappearing in parts of Victoria. Recently the focus has been on the exit of Local Government from the sector, traditionally the main provider in the State. However, their exit is only part of the story. A significant number of health networks and non-for-profit organisations have been providing good Meals on Wheels services for decades, particularly in rural areas. The steady erosion of the service model in Victoria, in both urban and rural areas, by both Local Government and non-for-profit providers, is being driven by the complexity of current policy settings, funding arrangements, government cost-shifting (local, state and federal) and misconceptions about the funding model.

In Australia and internationally Meals on Wheels is generally understood to encompass the following principles

- Principle 1. Meals delivered regularly to the home
- Principle 2. Monitoring of health and well-being
- Principle 3. Social connection to combat social isolation and loneliness
- Principle 4. Community capacity building by providing opportunities for volunteering

In many parts of Victoria activities associated with Principles 1 and 2 have been drastically curtailed and those associated with Principles 3 and 4 are disappearing. Services delivered three to five times a week by volunteers with all the associated health monitoring, community participation and social connection benefits, are operating kilometres away from areas where residents are struggling with frozen meals delivered weekly, sometimes fortnightly, by commercial companies. The latter is not Meals on Wheels and does not address the complex needs of vulnerable older Victorians or the vital preventative health care aspects of the traditional model.

The following issues are key to understanding the current Meals on Wheels situation in Victoria:

Financial Issues and Funding Arrangements

For the past seventy years services have been financially viable due to four main factors-

1. Government meal subsidy, which since 2015 has been provided through the Commonwealth Home Support Program (CHSP)
2. Provider contribution (up until recently this was primarily local government who contributed up to 35% of the costs)
3. Customer contribution (what the customer pays for the meal)
4. Volunteer labour

The **Australian government subsidy** provided via the CHSP program has increased significantly over the past six years. It now sits at around \$7.50 per meal. Until recently, Sector Support and Development funding to CHSP providers in Victoria helped with volunteer coordination and efficiently adjusting systems to implement successive policy changes, but this ceased in 2022.

The **provider contribution** varies significantly from organisation to organisation. When local government (LG) ceases being an aged care provider, the Australian government hands the CHSP contract to a not-for-profit organisation. These organisations are reducing or eliminating their provider contribution and limiting service scope, frequency and quality to ensure that the government subsidy and customer contribution covers the total cost of the meal and delivery. This has resulted in increased costs to customers, with some organisations charging above \$15 per meal. Historically, local governments have covered the gap between reasonable consumer contributions and the government subsidy to ensure the full cost of delivering services was met. This has masked the true cost of providing the service in Victoria.

Government Funding Pre 2015 – Home and Community Care (HACC) Program

From the 1980s through to 2015 home delivered meals were funded via the Victorian State Government Home and Community Care (HACC) Program. In Victoria, Local Government (mostly) in partnership with the State Government provided what many considered to be the Australian gold standard in holistic in-home support services.

Local government employed intake and assessment teams that assessed people within their LG area while also delivering a range of in-home support services. LG assessment officers would also refer to other allied and health professionals when necessary, and when a customer's needs became more complex refer onto individualised package providers.

Government Funding post 2015 – Commonwealth Home Support Program (CHSP)

In 2015 the Commonwealth Home Support Program (CHSP) was introduced by the Australian Government replacing the HACC program. The new CHSP Manual was similar to the previous HACC program manual with a greater emphasis on 'reablement', 'consumer choice' and 'person centred care'. However, there were no details/requirements about the composition and scope of an actual meal.

In addition, two fundamental structural changes were made, the introduction of **My Aged Care** (MAC) and the **Regional Assessment Service** (RAS). In order to access subsidized CHSP services, including Meals on Wheels, a potential customer had to register with My Aged Care. Once registered they were then referred to a RAS assessment officer.

My Aged Care (MAC)

During the transitional phase in 2015-16, most local governments assisted potential customers by 'referring-up'. Local residents often felt much more comfortable dealing with their local government employees, who would not only inform them about services offered, but take their details and pass them onto My Aged Care, who would in turn pass their assessment onto the RAS. However, within a few years this practice was stopped by many Councils (not all). By early 2020 almost every local government website instructed potential customers (over the age of 65) to ring My Aged Care if they wanted any in-home support services.

Meals on Wheels Victoria appreciates the objectives of MAC in attempting to provide a central entry point to a range of health services, and to record basic information once to avoid duplication for customers and providers. However, MAC acted as a disincentive for some potential customers. Feedback from the sector indicates that-

- Many people 'just wanted meals on wheels' and to talk and deal with a local provider they trusted (like local government) and didn't want to register with MAC.
- Family members trying to convince a loved one they needed help found it harder convincing them to talk to MAC rather than their 'local Council'.
- Most calls to our Meals on Wheels Victoria administration volunteers request contact numbers for local services. In some instances, our volunteers received angry calls back from service provider staff, along the lines of "don't you know that to get meals they have to ring My Aged Care?". In our experience most people making the *very confronting decision to ask*

for assistance (in the form of meals) are much more likely to engage with My Aged Care *after* they've been briefed about their local services by a local representative. There is also no expectation that information imparted will result in a referral back. The fact that potential customers have a choice is well understood by all CHSP provider staff (LG and other).

Regional Assessment Team (RAS)

In 2015-2016 local government assessment officers were re-assigned to Regional Assessment Teams. In reality they continued to be employed by local government.

Whereas before these assessment staff primarily referred to in-house home support services, the emphasis on 'consumer choice' embedded within the new system required them to offer a choice of each service needed, which usually meant offering comparable services provided in-house (within their local government) or private meal provision from commercial suppliers, usually delivered once a week. It is apples and oranges. Instead of being 'more than just a meal' it has increasingly become 'just a meal' (although still subsidized through the same funding stream).

The impact of the Active Service Model (ASM)

The ASM was introduced in the early 2010s in Victoria with many of its principles similar to the Commonwealth Home Support Program (CHSP). The aims and objectives centred around 'wellness' and 'active ageing' as well as capacity building and restorative care. However, such principles are open to interpretation and difficult to apply in many situations. The divergent approach taken by many Councils, other providers and assessment personnel, depended significantly on an organisation's culture and an individual's subjective view. In many instances, the language *associated* with the ASM started sounding more ideological than logical. This language also targeted Meals on Wheels, suggesting it didn't fit into the new paradigm. Some examples-

- A CEO of a national aged care peak body started referring to Meals on Wheels as a 'service of dependency'. This phrase was subsequently widely used in Victoria
- Within the sector key management and decision makers started referring to Meals on Wheels as-
 - a "passive" service, and
 - a service that "would not exist in a few years"
- Some industry consultants started echoing the same sentiments. One regional report riddled with qualitative and quantitative inaccuracies went so far as to suggest that Meals on Wheels encouraged "home institutionalisation".

Currently some local governments are exiting all CHSP services (only two LGs exiting CHSP service provision have decided to retain Meals on Wheels). Other providers are usually health providers/organisations, or what we refer to in this document as Not-for-Profits (many have been providing Meals on Wheels for years, especially in rural areas). Note- Local Government represented fifty-two of the eighty CHSP Meals on Wheels service providers in late 2022. Nine other LGs have told Meals on Wheels Victoria they're most likely exiting by July 2023 (we suspect the figure will be much higher).

Why are older Victorians' meal services being downgraded so drastically in some parts of the State?

The fundamental issue is the ***lack of clarity about CHSP funding for meals***. A provider new to the sector was recently given the CHSP contracts for two local government areas (both Councils had recently ceased providing services). When Meals on Wheels Victoria contacted them and asked if they wanted to become a member of the association their representative said, *"but we don't do Meals on Wheels"*. They deliver frozen meals *once a fortnight* to residents within their designated regions.

These CHSP providers receive the same government subsidy (\$7.50) as CHSP providers who still provide services in line with the Meals on Wheels model (and still utilise volunteers and deliver between 3 and 5 times a week).

The ***CHSP program does not fund Meals on Wheels***

The CHSP program subsidizes meals 'at home' or 'at a centre'. The closest the CHSP Manual ([See Appendix 1 link, page 13](#)) comes to describing the Meals on Wheels model is when it states *"providing meals to frail older people at home, a centre or in another setting may deliver a range of benefits. These include informal health monitoring of clients and supporting social participation e.g., time spent with the older person when delivering the meal and social interactions enjoyed by the older person at a centre or other setting"*.

Apart from some providers utilising the subsidy to provide café coupons to customers, it is unclear what circumstances encompass "other setting". The term "informal health monitoring" is as close as the manual gets to acknowledging this vital component of a Meals on Wheels service but downplays its legitimacy and importance by referring to it as "informal".

The ***CHSP manual does not define a "meal"***

There is also no clear definition of a "meal". Instead the manual refers providers to the Aged Care Quality Standards, which make only broad references to variety and quantity of food. This despite the Federal Government funding **National Meal Guidelines** ([see Appendix 2 link, page 13](#)) specific to the aged care sector in 2015, which clearly outline nutritional and dietary standards for a 3-course meal. This particular publication is only listed as a resource near the end of the manual.

The ***CHSP provider responsibilities in relation to individual needs***.

In 6.1.1 of the CHSP Manual it states that the provider should-

- *Provide services tailored to the unique circumstances and cultural preference of each client, their family and carers;*
- *Ensure choice and flexibility is optimised for each client, their carers and families;*
- *Invite clients to identify their preferences in service delivery and where possible honour that request; and*
- *Deliver services consistent with the goals and recommendations contained in the client's support plan as agreed with the My Aged Care assessor.*

If potential customers cannot reheat frozen meals due to cognitive or physical impairments, have a range of swallowing difficulties and need their food cut-up or modified, or have special dietary requirements, or are prone to falls and could benefit from monitoring multiple times a week ... then weekly or fortnightly supply of meals by a commercial supplier delivered by paid staff is unlikely to address their "circumstances", "preferences" or "goals". This reduced service is also unlikely to combat a sense of social isolation, maintain a sense of community connection and safety, or provide comfort and solace to families. It will most likely lead to a decrease in opportunities for local community members to assist others by volunteering.

The meal is reduced to a product transaction. All the benefits outlined in the paragraph above associated with a traditional Meals on Wheels service are lost. The most basic elements of the 'provider responsibilities' listed in 6.1.1 above, are being ignored with no consequences (for the funded organisation).

A volunteer recently reported delivering twelve meals on a delivery run. The meals were delivered hot. In three instances, she had to remove the lid and place the meal on a plate because the customers had bad arthritis and removing the lid was too difficult. This story highlights the following-

- 1) If the meal was delivered chilled or frozen by volunteers, they would still have the capacity to reheat and plate the meal for these customers.
- 2) If the meals were delivered frozen (weekly or fortnightly) by paid staff, the meals would not be suitable in such instances, unless the service provider paid other support staff to go in and reheat the meal.

We have been informed that some package providers are paying support workers to specifically go in and reheat meals for some customers. There is concern that precious resources are being utilised for tasks, that were not always needed when Meals on Wheels was provided. This is particularly acute at the moment with staff shortages and a potential drain on Home Care Package resources.

Who is the custodian of Meals on Wheels? Who decides if the service is worth preserving?

There is not one stakeholder who can claim to be the custodian of Meals on Wheels, or who has the capacity to make universal decisions about the service's preservation. The service seems to be caught in policy cross currents, where objectives and outcomes shape-shift between the stakeholders involved.

In terms of sheer power, one could argue that the **Australian Government**, who provides the subsidy through the CHSP has the most influence. When it announced in January 2022 that the CHSP was going to be replaced by a more market driven new Support at Home program in July 2023 (now extended to July 2024) the impact in Victoria was pronounced-

- it hastened the pace of local government exits from aged care provision significantly.
- when Australian government staff assigned new CHSP contracts they failed to ensure that transitional arrangements guaranteed the same level of service to customers.

All indicators are that the new Support at Home program will mean-

- the categorisation of "meals" will be similar to the current CHSP manual
- that the term 'Meals on Wheels' will not be mentioned

Credit should be given to the Australian Government for raising the CHSP subsidy to the equivalent of \$7.50 in Victoria, but this is still about \$3.00 less than NSW, and in no way comes close to closing the gap between subsidy and customer contribution (fees).

Next in line would be **Service Providers** (both Local Government and non-for-profit organisations). It's telling that two local governments in Victoria with very strong Healthy and Active Ageing plans in place, exited all CHSP services, except Meals on Wheels. ***Both saw the service as complimentary to other services within the community, absolutely essential for vulnerable residents, and highly valuable in terms of volunteer opportunities and community cohesion.***

Next would be **State Government**, whose health and ageing bureaucracy has strong connections with their federal counterparts. The State Government lobbied hard in 2015 to ensure elements of the HACC program were enshrined in the then new CHSP program. It should also be noted that the State

Government still funds 'meals' to under 65's through the HACC program but at an even lower subsidy rate than CHSP meals. This has meant that some providers have maintained CHSP meal provision but ceased providing HACC meals (which has added further confusion and fragmentation). So far, the State Government has not developed a position based on what is happening to traditional Meals on Wheels services in Victoria.

Next would be **Meals on Wheels Australia (MOWA)** (the national peak body for meal service providers and owner of the Meals on Wheels trademark) who on behalf of **Meals on Wheels Victoria** has made the responsible ministers in the current Labour Government aware of the situation within Victoria. So far there is no indication of any changes in policy (although we note that the recent CHSP Manual update featured more information and guidance on CHSP contract transitions, presumably after feedback from the sector in Victoria was included in a MOWA issues paper). The **Support At Home Alliance** is strongly advocating for changes to the proposed Support at Home program that includes the categorisation of meal provision (including monitoring) for funding purposes, but no specific lobbying has been done regarding the Victorian situation in relation to the erosion of the service model.

The most important stakeholders are the **Customers** (both service recipients and volunteers) their carers and families. *The most important people seem to have the least say* in whether quality services continue in their local communities.

What happens when customers complain?

Recently, when a resident (used to receiving quality meals from their local government, cooked locally and delivered by volunteers) refused meals from the new CHSP provider (who subcontracted the service to once a week delivery from a commercial provider) they complained to the Australian Government. A letter of reply by a senior staff member on behalf of the Health Minister acknowledged the importance of Meals on Wheels and the role it played in assisting senior Australians to remain living at home, and the complainant's concern about clients becoming socially isolated without daily contact provided during the deliveries. It encouraged them to raise concerns with the provider, who the writer of the letter assured them, were committed to providing nutritious meals. They then recommended raising the matter with the Older Persons Advocacy Network (OPAN), and if the matter could not be resolved, to consult My Aged Care via the 'find a provider' search engine or by phone. They then recommended participating in the current aged care reform process and forums and provided a link to Aged Care Engagement Hub.

The complainant-

- didn't contact the new provider (again) as they had already had contact with them and were told that the service provided was all that was on offer
- They contacted OPAN, but because they were no longer actually getting a service, OPAN could not assist
- They consulted the My Aged Care website 'find a provider' section and were presented with information on providers in municipalities hundreds of kilometres away, that didn't deliver a meal service in their area. This was then followed up by phone calls, but ultimately, no alternative provider was available and or suitable.
- They accessed the Aged Care Engagement Hub and provided feedback.

Needless to say, the advice regarding follow up action, would be challenging for most people, let alone an elderly person who may not be tech savvy, is not used to self-advocating or complaining about services, or who has cognitive issues. While the letter acknowledged the importance of Meals

on Wheels, the risk of social isolation and even the challenge for many in the storing and reheating of frozen meals, these concerns were somewhat undercut by an assurance that the new provider was committed to providing 'nutritious' meals via subcontracting to a commercial provider (once a week).

The same complainant did complain via email to their local council, whose response was, that as they no longer provided the service, any complaints should now be directed to the new provider. No advocacy was offered on behalf of their local resident. When the complainant contacted Meals on Wheels Victoria, they expressed dismay at the lack of respect for elderly people, and the fact that self-advocating was beyond the capacity for many, especially those facing daily living challenges. They also expressed their feelings of powerlessness, as it seemed the only people that were really in a position to rectify the situation were those funding the system. In the past the complainant and other service recipients had local, democratically elected Councillors to air their concerns with. Now these councillors had "wiped their hands of us".

Preventative Care and Government Cost Shifting

Meals subsidized through the CHSP program are for eligible people over 65. For those under 65, meals are subsidized via the HACC program, and some cross these age categories when receiving meals through NDIS.

The majority of Meals on Wheels customers are over-65 and of these, the **largest age cohort are aged between 80 and 90**. The primary reason they receive meals is to assist them to remain living independently in their own homes. The driving force behind government funding is preventative care; fiscally, it helps reduce hospital visits, and or, premature entry in to aged care facilities.

We suspect that-

- The increasing move towards once a week (sometimes a fortnight) frozen meal delivery is attractive for some in that it provides more choice, but not to others who have trouble storing and reheating meals, prefer more regular deliveries, and require special dietary or texture modified food.
- Historically, local governments have covered the gap between reasonable customer contributions (what customers pay) and the government subsidy to ensure the full cost of delivering services was met. Increasingly, providers do not consider it viable to underwrite the funding shortfall, or actively decide to under-deliver to balance funding and cost.

Both of the above dot points represent what was referred to earlier in this document as **government cost shifting**. For example, if Local Government or a Non-For-Profit provider subsidizes the service, and then passes on some of these costs to the customer in the form of higher fees, and also saves money by buying cheaper meals, it makes their Meals on Wheels service less affordable and less appealing. This potentially puts many people who need good nutrition, monitoring and social connection at risk. It's important to mention here, the increasing evidence about the health impacts of both loneliness and social isolation that the Meals on Wheels model helps mitigate.

These factors might mean that some peoples' capacity to stay in their homes for longer is reduced, by increasing their risk of hospitalisation and going into permanent care. ***A portion of costs saved in preventative care services rebound back on the Australian Government and also flow onto the State Government*** potentially costing taxpayers much more.

Meals on Wheels Victoria supports the main thrust of the CHSP manual with its focus on intensive services to increase capacity and then minimal services there-after, or as required. The cohort most

representative of Meals on Wheels customers is aged between 80 and 90 years of age. Their capacity *and* willingness to engage in social activities decreases over time, this is quite marked in the case of men. Issues such as mobility, hearing loss, incontinence and cognitive impairment can be mitigated with interventions on occasion, but not always.

A Meals on Wheels volunteer recently told Meals on Wheels Victoria-

"The majority of people I deliver meals to, live alone, and want to spend their last years at home. Most don't go to centres or clubs anymore, some never did. So, they're isolated. The rumours are they'll get rid of us volunteers, which will be devastating for these people. Who is going to check on them every day? And many won't be able to handle frozen meals. We're told they'll have to send in paid homecare workers to heat meals, which is a joke, because it'll cost a bomb and they can't get enough workers anyhow. I reckon most of the people I deliver to would have to go into permanent care within weeks. It's shocking".

It is important to mention that there are still Local Governments and Non-for-Profit providers committed to the traditional Meals on Wheels model. Most feedback from the sector indicates that a CHSP contract transfer from Local Government to a Non-For-Profit organisation leads to a downgrade of services. However, we have been made aware of one area where this did not occur. After one contract transfer the traditional Meals on Wheels model is still in place due to intense lobbying and engagement between the LG that gave up the contract, CHSP contract staff and the new NFP CHSP provider. The LG was determined the service their residents were accustomed to receiving remained the same (their residents currently still get meals from the same catering company delivered by the same volunteers). A snapshot of these volunteers was recently provided to Meals on Wheels Victoria (see Appendix 3, page 13) and is, a) a compelling picture of community engagement and b) a stark example of what is potentially being lost in other parts of Victoria.

However, it remains to be seen how long this arrangement will last, given that the same organisation took over another LG area where they have since implemented once a week frozen meal delivery. The latter is considerably cheaper for the organisation as it contracts the delivery to the commercial meal provider.

Volunteers and the Community

Who benefits from Meals on Wheels?

What will be lost for communities if it disappears?

The Meals on Wheels delivery model has historically engaged local volunteers who are often older residents. The social impact and value to community and the customer and volunteer relationship has often been underestimated and lost once services shifted to a weekly/fortnightly uber eats style drop off. ***As governments internationally and locally scramble to address ageing populations and sustainable health care systems, the underlying principles of Meals on Wheels makes it an incredibly cost effective and innovative preventative health model.***

A Meals on Wheels volunteer recently told Meals on Wheels Victoria

"The relationships we have with these people is gold, we look out for them, we cheer them up, we tell them to see the doctor if we're worried about them. We're like surrogate family, especially when their son or daughter lives a long way away. For years the government has been banging on about how we have to provide services to people to help them live in their homes longer. Well, we're free damn labour, all the government has to do is help with the cost of a meal. As a volunteer, I find it offensive when I hear that a Meals on Wheels service is too expensive to run. It's very depressing".

Meals on Wheels Victoria – in danger of folding

Since early 2020 Meals on Wheels Victoria received funding from MOWA to support the association and Victorian meal providers during the Covid-19 pandemic and upcoming CHSP / Support at Home program changes. In this time the association has-

- Employed a part time State Manager (whose tenure ends on March 30th 2023 when funding is exhausted)
- Developed new position descriptions and on-boarded a team of administration volunteers
- Engaged with all service providers in Victoria and passed on vital information and statistics to the Australian Government (via MOWA), State Government and the Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) which was crucial during the early stages of the Covid-19 pandemic (*see Appendix 4 link, page 13*)
- Developed a new, more comprehensive database and surveyed providers to facilitate ongoing engagement with services to ensure we have up to date records and can respond to issues facing the sector.
- By this ongoing engagement with services, membership increased from 55 to 75 between 2020 and 2022 (Victoria has 79 LG areas and as of late 2022, 80 service providers (this is slowly decreasing as some providers take over 2 to 3 LG areas that were previously serviced by 3 different providers).
- Developed new **Best Practice Guidelines** (*see Appendix 5 link, page 13*) which are now widely used within the sector as a quality management tool (and are being adopted in other States). This document is an invaluable resource for new providers of the service.
- Developed a new website and contact capacity for providers, customers, government, the media and other stakeholders.
- Continued to promote and educate various stakeholders about the social welfare and health benefits of the service through member forums and newsletters

When this MOWA funding runs out at the end of March, Victoria will be back to its base funding, which amounts to \$7170 plus our membership fees per annum. When you subtract the MOWA membership fee, plus other costs, there is insufficient funds to employ personnel to manage our volunteer administration team, which currently consists of 4 people who volunteer approximately ½ to 1 day a week on average. This poses a risk to the ongoing sustainability and viability of the State association. If Meals on Wheels Victoria ceases to exist-

- We will no longer have a collective voice for the service in Victoria.
- Victoria will have no representation on the national board of MOWA.
- Victorians will no longer have an organisation dedicated to preserving the integrity of the service model and speaking collectively for volunteers, staff and customers
- Victorians will no longer be able to seek advice and guidance from our administrative volunteers
- There will no longer be Meals on Wheels specific data on volunteers, customers and service providers available for governments, the media and other stakeholders.
- The conduit to government and other organisations for
 - policy and system consultation and development
 - data, advice and support during pandemics and emergency situations, will be severed.
- The Meals on Wheels Victoria Best Practice Guidelines for services will not be updated

Summary

The current policy and system settings effectively mean-

1. More organisations are providing meals once a week (sometimes fortnightly), even though the storage (of such a quantity) and handling of these frozen meals is beyond the capacity of many older people.
2. The monitoring of frail, vulnerable, physically challenged or cognitively impaired older Australians is highly likely to occur less frequently.
3. The dramatic reduction in the number of person-to-person contacts, due to the loss of volunteers, may increase the sense of isolation and disconnection for many vulnerable older Australians and lead to increases in loneliness. A Meals on Wheels delivery person maybe the only human contact a customer has on a regular basis.
4. Removing volunteer infrastructure will lead to a decrease in opportunities for community participation in a service that's highly regarded by most Australians, particularly for active older people who rely on the service for their sense of community connection.

Points 1, 2, 3, above, can only ever be partially mitigated by redeploying paid staff to heat up meals, cook in-house, or visit customers. At a time when providers have waiting lists for basic in-home services and are struggling with staff shortages (some have waiting lists) it seems unlikely it will be possible to re-direct such precious resources.

Recommendations

We ask both Federal and State Governments to work with Meals on Wheels Victoria on the following recommendations-

1. There needs to be an **urgent review and impact assessment** that addresses recent developments within the Meals on Wheels sector to ensure the best outcomes for older Victorians, which encompasses
 - detailed examination of the consequences for older people in areas where the traditional Meals on Wheels services have been replaced by weekly or fortnightly deliveries and the impact on communities and volunteers
 - the role of local government and best practice models of stewardship and advocacy for elderly residents (regardless of whether the Local Government is the aged care provider in a particular area or not).
 - funding uncertainty for volunteer organisations in Victoria.
2. Investigation into how we empower and enable communities and smaller organisations to participate in Australian Government funded aged care services in the future. Smaller organisations, some with more experience in meal provision and delivery, might be better positioned to provide Meals on Wheels services efficiently using local resources and volunteers.
3. Ensure Meals on Wheels Victoria continues as an association for all the reasons listed on page 11 by providing operational funding (on top of sector support and development funding of \$7170 currently received annually) to continue to advocate for eligible Victorian residents by employing staff to support its day to day functions, provide input into government policy and program system development and ongoing support for volunteer administration staff. Estimate, \$140,000 (two to three part time personnel).

Appendix / Links

Appendix 1 Link

CHSP Manual

<https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/commonwealth-home-support-programme-chsp-manual?language=en>

Appendix 2 Link

National Meals Guidelines

<https://mealsonwheels.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/NationalMealsGuidelines.pdf>

Appendix 3

Snapshot of volunteers in one LG area now managed by the new NFP CHSP provider

While most volunteers are older, the reasons they engage varies. Examples are-

- those on Mental Health Care Plans.
- people who want to do it as an ode to their parents who received the service themselves.
- former health care professionals who still want to provide a service to the community.
- retired teachers who deliver to their own teachers from their younger years.
- employers who give their employees time in lieu for assisting with Meals on Wheels deliveries
- local community groups and businesses like Red Cross, Rotary, Banks and Hardware Stores
- local school children and adult day service clients.

Appendix 4

Increase in demand during early stages of Covid-19 pandemic

Figures below are based on a special intensive phone survey of CHSP service providers (over 95% response rate) in 2020 to both members and non-members of Meals on Wheels Victoria. This information was sought, then shared with the State Government, MAV and Federal Government.

The service played a crucial role in the pandemic, ensuring people were fed *and* safe during lockdowns. The contacts between staff, volunteers and customers during this period was incredibly important.

Victoria-wide stats 2020 between Pre-Feb to mid April			
Meals = Per Week Clients = On books	Feb 20 Pre- Covid 19	April 20 Peak 1 st Wave	
No. Clients	8543	10,459	22% inc
No. Meals	27,329	35,045	28% inc

Appendix 5 Link

Meals on Wheels Victoria Best Practice Guidelines 2022

<https://mealsonwheelsvictoria.org.au/news/meals-on-wheels-victoria-launches-best-practice-guidelines/>

From: s47F [redacted]
 To: s47F [redacted]
 Subject: FW: Meals on Wheels Services in Victoria at serious risk of collapse [SEC=OFFICIAL]
 Date: Thursday 16 November 2023 12:12:00 PM
 Attachments: [image001.png](#)
[image003.png](#)

s22

From: s47F [redacted] <[\[redacted\]@Health.gov.au](mailto:[redacted]@Health.gov.au)>
 Sent: Friday 15 September 2023 3:13 PM
 To: Minister Wells <[\[redacted\]@Health.gov.au](mailto:[redacted]@Health.gov.au)>
 Subject: RE: Meals on Wheels Services in Victoria at serious risk of collapse [SEC=OFFICIAL]

Can I also please request for the relevant person in the department to contact me about this?

Thanks
 s47F [redacted]

From: s47F [redacted]
 Sent: Wednesday 13 September 2023 4:37 PM
 To: Minister Wells <Minister.Wells@Health.gov.au>
 Subject: FW: Meals on Wheels Services in Victoria at serious risk of collapse [SEC=OFFICIAL]

Hello

Can I please request for following for this enquiry –

- M-response to come to me
- QTB update

Thanks
 s47F [redacted]

From: s47F [redacted]
 Sent: Wednesday 13 September 2023 4:12 PM
 To: s47F [redacted] <[\[redacted\]@Health.gov.au](mailto:[redacted]@Health.gov.au)>
 Cc: Minister Wells <[\[redacted\]@Health.gov.au](mailto:[redacted]@Health.gov.au)>
 Subject: FW: Meals on Wheels Services in Victoria at serious risk of collapse [SEC=OFFICIAL]

Hey

Looking for some direction here? Normally I would just say a D-response but they have sent this to our Victorian senators and they are asking for how they can respond.

From: s47F [redacted] (Sen R. Ciccone) <[\[redacted\]@aph.gov.au](mailto:[redacted]@aph.gov.au)>
 Sent: Wednesday 13 September 2023 2:26 PM
 To: s47F [redacted] <[\[redacted\]@Health.gov.au](mailto:[redacted]@Health.gov.au)>
 Subject: FW: Meals on Wheels Services in Victoria at serious risk of collapse

Hi s47F [redacted]

I hope this email finds you well.

As the attached letter has been sent to all Victorian MPs and Senators s47C [redacted]

Kind regards



s47F [redacted]
 Office of Senator Raffi Ciccone
 Deputy Government Whip in the Senate
 Federal Labor Senator for Victoria
 1A Blackburn Road, Blackburn VIC 3130
 EO s47F [redacted] / PH s47F [redacted] / E s47F [redacted] <[\[redacted\]@aph.gov.au](mailto:[redacted]@aph.gov.au)>
Senator@ciccone.com.au

From: s47F [redacted] <[\[redacted\]@mealsonwheelsvictoria.org.au](mailto:[redacted]@mealsonwheelsvictoria.org.au)>
 Sent: Monday August 7 2023 8:50 AM
 Subject: Meals on Wheels Services in Victoria at serious risk of collapse

Dear Victorian MPs/ Senators

Please find attached a letter from Meals on Wheels Victoria (with relevant attachments) on behalf of our members outlining some serious concerns regarding funding for meals on wheels services in Victoria and the federally funded Future Fit Program.

Yours sincerely

s47F [redacted]

MOWV

From: s47F (Sen R. Ciccone)
To: s47F
Subject: RE: Meals on Wheels Services in Victoria at serious risk of collapse [SEC=OFFICIAL]
Date: Monday, 18 September 2023 5:00:58 PM
Attachments: [image001.png](#)
[image002.png](#)

H s47F

s47F

Yes I can confirm the email was received on 7 August.

Regards



s47F
 Office of Senator Ralf Ciccone
 Deputy Government Whip in the Senate
 Federal Labor Senator for Victoria
 1A Blackburn Road, Blackburn VIC 3130
 EO s47F / PH s47F / E s47F @aph.gov.au
Senator@ciccone.com.au

From: s47F @Health.gov.au>
Sent: Thursday, September 14, 2023 8:56 AM
To: s47F (Sen R. Ciccone) s47F @aph.gov.au>
Subject: RE: Meals on Wheels Services in Victoria at serious risk of collapse [SEC: OFFICIAL]

H s47F

Thank you for sending this through – I'll get you some words to respond to this enquiry with. Can I confirm if this was received on 7 Aug. we are trying to see if our office received this too.

Thanks

s47F

Adviser – Aged Care, Parliamentary & Caucus

Office of the Hon. Anika Wells MP
 Minister for Aged Care | Minister for Sport
 Member for Lilley

M s47F | E s47F @health.gov.au

From: s47F (Sen R. Ciccone) s47F @aph.gov.au>
Sent: Wednesday, 13 September 2023 2:26 PM
To: s47F @Health.gov.au>
Subject: FW: Meals on Wheels Services in Victoria at serious risk of collapse

H s47F

I hope this email finds you well.

As the attached letter has been sent to all Victorian MPs and Senator s47C

Kind regards



s47F
 Office of Senator Ralf Ciccone
 Deputy Government Whip in the Senate
 Federal Labor Senator for Victoria
 1A Blackburn Road, Blackburn VIC 3130
 EO s47F / PH s47F / E s47F @aph.gov.au
Senator@ciccone.com.au

From: s47F @mealsonwheelsvictoria.org.au>
Sent: Monday, August 7, 2023 8:50 AM
Subject: Meals on Wheels Services in Victoria at serious risk of collapse

Dear Victorian MPs/ Senators

Please find attached a letter from Meals on Wheels Victoria (with relevant attachments) on behalf of our members outlining some serious concerns regarding funding for meals on wheels services in Victoria and the federally funded Future Fit Program.

Yours sincerely

s47F

MOWV

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