

# What Does a Meal Cost?

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As many of you have noticed, and as our new signs now indicate, the cost for a meal at Dane County meal sites and in our home-delivered meal program have increased. I'd like to share with you how the cost of a meal is determined.

Let's start with some important numbers. In the past 12 months, through 28 different senior dining sites and our home-delivered meal program throughout Dane County, we served 235,403 meals to seniors. I often hear the meal program described as a "free" meal program, when nothing could be further from the truth. The cost to prepare, deliver, and serve these 235,403 meals was \$1,724,738, or an average of \$7.32 per meal. Yet, if you recall, for the past 12 months we posted a meal cost of \$6.15 per meal. So why the difference?

In prior years, the Area Agency on Aging of Dane County only posted the cost to Dane County for the meal (\$6.15), not the total cost required by the site to serve the meal and operate the meal site (\$7.32). Effective October 1, 2013 the posted cost of the meal at \$7.50 reflects the average total cost to provide the meal at a meal site, not just the amount paid by Dane County. It includes the cost of raw food and materials, preparation, and delivery of the meal to the meal sites by the caterer, to include fuel. It further includes the staffing and other costs incurred by the site to serve the meal at the senior dining site. For home-delivered meals it includes the additional packaging, supplies and delivery equipment needed to safely provide home delivered meals to the homebound.

We've all seen rising costs in groceries and gasoline for our family budgets. This program is no different. That it only actually increased 18 cents this year is really quite remarkable. I know this is due to the hard work done by the nutrition staff at all of our sites in reducing wasted food in the program and creating efficiencies wherever possible. Please take time to congratulate them on a job well done! While our average cost per meal in Dane County is \$7.50 at dining sites and \$7.75 for home-delivered meals, the average cost across the State of Wisconsin is presently \$8.98 per meal.

## **So where does the money for the Senior Nutrition Program come from?**

It might surprise you to know that of the \$1,829,738 budgeted to serve more than 235,000 meals in the coming year, twenty-four percent (24%) or \$452,410 comes from you and the generous contributions you make toward the cost of your or a loved one's meal. The remainder comes from the following sources: Federal and State, \$885,672; County General Purpose Revenue, \$186,520; and, local municipalities and agency fundraising, \$305,136.

## **So why set a suggested minimum contribution amount?**

First and foremost, this is what it says: a suggestion. We understand that individual finances will determine the amount, if any, a person can contribute. We set this for those that would simply like a guide. If half of the persons served a meal contribute this amount, while others contribute a little more, a little less, or none at all based upon what their finances will allow, we could continue the program at the current level of service. While you are asked to anonymously contribute what you can to the program for your meal, if your circumstances do not allow for this, a contribution is not required. Regardless of your contribution, ***you are always welcome at our table or to receive a home-delivered meal.***