

Meals on Wheels: awareness-raising of the service and its benefits is needed to aid prevention in adult social care

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About the research

More than 15 million adults in England live with care and support needs due to a long-term condition or disability. Many of these adults need help with shopping for food and preparing meals. With the social care system in crisis, and carers employed through social care agencies not always allocated enough time to cook a nutritious meal, Meals on Wheels services can be essential to these individuals, who wish to continue living in their communities but need support to do so.

Researchers from the School for Policy Studies led in-depth interviews with 28 recipients of Meals on Wheels services and family members of users of Meals on Wheels who referred them to the service, recruited via four service providers across England. This research adds to the limited evidence of perceptions of service users with Meals on Wheels services in England, and is the first to explore experiences with services from the perspective of family referrers. Following this study, six participants with lived experience of Meals on Wheels (users of services and their family referrers) took part in four workshops, held from May to July 2023, to co-produce two infographics to raise awareness of Meals on Wheels:

- Our 'Meals on Wheels – is this for you?' infographic can be used by general practitioners, hospital discharge teams, and social and community carers and workers, as a resource to inform referral decisions to Meals on Wheels services. It can also be used by service providers as a resource to raise awareness of Meals on Wheels benefits on their websites and publicity materials.
- Our 'The significance of Meals on Wheels' infographic highlights the benefits of Meals on Wheels services to users of the service and their families. This resource can be used by Meals on Wheels providers when they seek funding for the continuation or enhancement of their services. It can also be used by commissioners and policy makers as a resource to inform decisions about reintroducing, or continuing to fund, Meals on Wheels services.

Policy recommendations

- Adult social care teams, health and housing services should recognise Meals on Wheels as a crucial preventative resource in maintaining the physical and mental wellbeing and independence of adults with care and support needs.
- The national Government needs to support local authorities, and other service providers, with the financial means needed for the successful running of Meals on Wheels services.
- Meals on Wheels providers should consider making their services known more widely, to support referrals to the service by healthcare professionals, social care workers, paid and unpaid carers, as well as family members of adults with care and support needs.
- Meals on Wheels providers should consider enhancing their awareness raising strategies to address preconceptions surrounding the service.

Meals on Wheels could support adults with care needs to remain nourished, socially connected, and living in their own home and communities for longer.



Image Credit: ©Bristol City Council

Key findings

- Our research has suggested four crucial benefits of Meals on Wheels services:

a) They help access a daily meal: The meals require little to no preparation, making it easy for any adult with care and support needs to have a tasty, nutritious meal every day. This could help address malnutrition.

b) They help reduce social isolation: It is usually the same drivers who deliver the meal to a user of the service. This human contact and seeing a familiar face could improve mental wellbeing.

c) They help highlight any concerns: Drivers who deliver the meals can check for safety and wellbeing concerns. This could support users of Meals on Wheels to continue living in their own home for longer.

d) They can promote independence: Receiving Meals on Wheels could prevent or delay the move into residential care. This could substantially reduce costs to social care services and the NHS.

- Despite various perceived referral routes (e.g. via social and support workers, as well as carers employed via social care agencies), family members perceived they were the ones most likely to refer, and set up, Meals on Wheels for someone. Highlighting the availability of Meals on Wheels services, and their benefits, to general practitioners,

hospital discharge teams and social workers and community carers could increase professional referrals to services.

- Several stereotypes surrounding Meals on Wheels were highlighted by participants, including the preconception that the service is solely intended for 'older people' or that the food reminds people of 'school meals'. These preconceptions could prevent Meals on Wheels uptake. In their awareness raising strategies, Meals on Wheels providers could address these stereotypes by highlighting that Meals on Wheels is for any individual who cannot prepare their own meals, irrespective of age, and providing testimonials about the quality of meals on offer, as reported by our research participants.
- Our earlier work exploring the perceptions of Meals on Wheels providers suggested that many people who could benefit from the service do not know that Meals on Wheels exist. Our research suggested that users of the service and their family referrers had generally heard of Meals on Wheels, but that people do not register such information until they actually need to use the service. This lack of service awareness might hinder uptake. Meals on Wheels providers should consider enhancing their publicity activities to ensure wide awareness of the service's existence, but also awareness of the wider benefits of the service.

Further information

Papadaki A et al (2023) [‘The service, I could not do without it...’: A qualitative study exploring the significance of Meals on Wheels among service users and people who refer them to the service](#). Health and Social Care in the Community

Papadaki A et al (2023) [‘Accessing Meals on Wheels: a qualitative study exploring the experiences of service users and people who refer them to the service’](#). Preprints 2023, 2023090310.

Papadaki A et al (2022) [‘It’s not just about the dinner; it’s about everything else that we do’: A qualitative study exploring how Meals on Wheels meet the needs of self-isolating adults during COVID-19](#). Health and Social Care in the Community

[Meals on Wheels: raising awareness of the service through co-produced knowledge translation tools](#) (Blog)

[Both infographics can be found on the next two pages. These can be downloaded \(in jpeg and pdf format\).](#)

Contact the researchers

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MEALS ON WHEELS

IS THIS FOR YOU?

I know someone who can't leave home to buy food and can't cook meals for themselves. How can I support them?

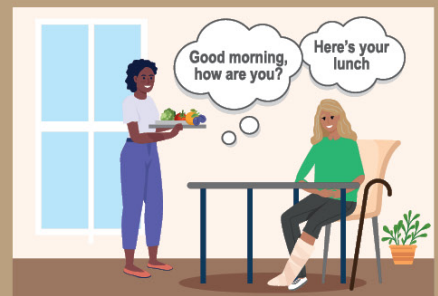
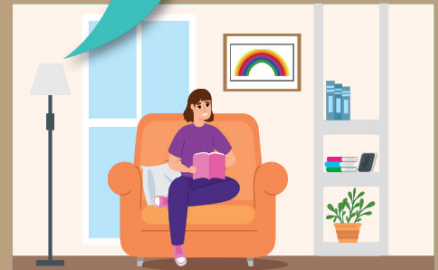
I would really like a tasty meal but I'm not able to leave the house to buy food or need support with cooking

Here's how the Meals on Wheels service can help you:

Provides a tasty meal that needs little or no preparation, saving the hassle of shopping, preparing, cooking and cleaning up.
A variety of meals to choose from and a variety of dietary needs catered for.

Meals you can count on - the service won't fail you as it delivers throughout the year, when you need it.

The meal delivery is an enjoyable visit - you'll see a familiar face, as meals are usually delivered by the same drivers.



Where can I find more information?

Call your GP or Local Authority Social Services

Visit bit.ly/3CE3sJl (Local Authority)

Visit bit.ly/3CFRNK4 (Adult Social Services)

Scan the QR codes:

GOV UK Meals on Wheels

NHS Adult Social Services



More about the research:
<http://bitly.ws/PPhZ>

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THE SIGNIFICANCE OF MEALS ON WHEELS

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BRISTOL

AMONG USERS OF THE SERVICE AND THEIR NEXT OF KIN

A new qualitative study highlights the benefits of Meals on Wheels and why the service could become an essential part of social care services

NUTRITIOUS MEALS

- The meal delivery can act as a prompt to eat for people with cognitive decline or other mental health issues
- The meals require little or no preparation, making it easy for older users of the service and those with mobility, and other challenges, to have a meal every day
- This can contribute to reduced risk of malnutrition and hospital admissions



REDUCING SOCIAL ISOLATION

- The human contact provided by drivers when they deliver the meals could become an essential component for many users of the service in improving wellbeing



WELLBEING CHECKS

- The drivers' check-ins can highlight any safety or other concerns
- This can assist some users of the service to continue living in their own home for longer



PROMOTING INDEPENDENCE

- Receiving Meals on Wheels can help prevent or delay the move into residential care
- This can substantially reduce subsequent costs to social care services and the NHS



MEALS ON WHEELS SHOULD BE CONSIDERED AN ESSENTIAL COMPONENT OF ADULT SOCIAL CARE

- Carers employed through social care agencies are not always allocated enough time to cook a hot meal
- Meals on Wheels are a lifeline and should receive enhanced and ongoing support from national and local Governments

“ People who use Meals on Wheels, and their families, commonly say: ”

'It's nice when somebody knocks at the door and you know it's dinner time, it gives a point to the day, especially when it's a hot meal.'

'They're a very important part of my daily life. I couldn't do without the service, it's excellent.'

'They are doing a sterling service and keeping people in their own homes.'

'They are a key part of helping me to care for my father because it gives me the freedom to know that at lunchtime, if I wasn't there, he would be okay. It's a complete lifesaver for me.'