



# Older Adult Lobby Day

February 27, 2024

## FY25 Budget Priorities

### Massachusetts Demographics (source: UMass Boston's Center for Social and Demographic Research on Aging):

- Massachusetts has 143 older adults (age 60+) for every 100 school-age children
- Currently, 23% of Massachusetts residents are 60 or older and it's estimated that by 2030, that will rise to 26%.
- Among older adult households, approximately 25% have incomes below \$20,000 (with the strongest concentrations in the Boston, Worcester, and Springfield areas, followed by Fall River and New Bedford)

### ***Increase the SHINE Health Benefits Counseling Program Line Item 9110-1455 by \$3 million***

Mass Home Care requests that the Legislature **add \$3 million** to line item 9110-1455 to **support the ongoing costs** of SHINE (Serving the Health Insurance Needs of Everyone) health insurance benefits counseling and to prepare **to expand services to meet the growing need**, especially when the asset limit for Medicare Savings Programs is eliminated in early 2024 and many more older adults will need assistance applying for these vitally important programs.

What is SHINE benefits counseling? SHINE provides **free** health insurance information, counseling, and assistance to Massachusetts residents and their caregivers. SHINE counselors (**more than 650 volunteers** in FY2022) are **trained and certified** to assist older adults and individuals with disabilities in understanding their Medicare and MassHealth benefits, along with other health insurance options.

Almost **100,000 individuals** relied on **SHINE counseling in FY2022** (vs. just over 70,000 in FY2021 - a **more than 42% increase**) and the demand continues to grow. With over 10,000 people reaching retirement age in our country every day, continued funding of this initiative is critical to ensure that our SHINE benefits counselors can continue to **provide local, trusted, and unbiased health insurance counseling information and assistance at no cost** to older adults and individuals with disabilities across Massachusetts.

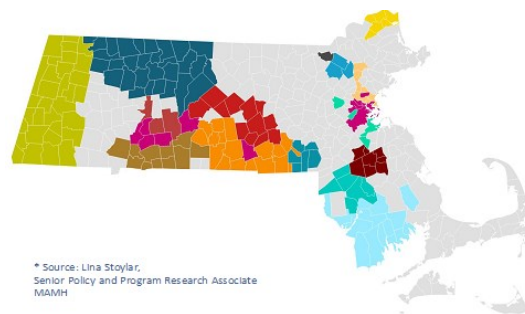
### ***Increase the Elder Mental Health Outreach Team (EMHOT) Line Item 9110-1640 by \$2 million***

The current allocation of \$2.5 million is a significant investment which provides vital mental health services, but **covers less than half of the state**. This map illustrates the EMHOT "deserts" across Massachusetts where this support is lacking. With an increase of \$2 million in this line item, we could provide critically important services to many more municipalities to address the growing need.

Elder Mental Health Outreach Teams (EMHOTs) play a unique role as a community-based behavioral health program for older adults, especially in underserved communities where there is a glaring lack of access to these critically important services.

The **COVID pandemic had a devastating impact on older adults**, not just in their physical health, but also with their behavioral health including isolation, loneliness, depression, suicide, and substance use disorder. EMHOT staff are able to intervene quickly and **address emergencies before they turn into costly hospital admissions or nursing home placements**.

In just the **first six months of 2023**, EMHOTs provided **5,733 hours of support to 858 clients**. They also **intervened in 177 crisis situations**, which leads to **estimated savings of between \$885,000 and \$2.8 million in healthcare costs** (typically \$5,000-\$16,000 per hospital stay for those admitted with mental illnesses). EMHOTs are a **proven, successful model that works** because the staff have longstanding trust relationships in their communities and are able to identify signs and symptoms of problems, make referrals, and provide wrap around services that allow older adults to remain living in their homes and live healthier lives.





## ***Increase the Senior Nutrition Program Line Item 9110-1900 by \$3 million***

For over 40 years, our Aging Service Access Points (ASAP) network and the Executive Office of Elder Affairs (EOEA) have administered the Massachusetts Senior Nutrition Program. This initiative supports 27 local nutrition programs throughout the state, **serving over ten million meals** to approximately **83,000 older adults each year**.

The Senior Nutrition Program, commonly referred to as “Meals on Wheels,” delivers meals to older adults in their own homes and provides meals at more than **400 statewide congregate meal sites**, including local Councils on Aging and senior affordable housing sites.

In Massachusetts, **45% of those receiving home-delivered meals have relied on this program for three years or longer**, and **one-third of program clients say they would experience food insecurity without the support of the Senior Nutrition Program**. A Consumers Affairs report published in late 2023 estimated a **6.6% increase in grocery costs** in Massachusetts vs. 2022, and nationally there was a **25.5% increase in grocery costs over the prior two years**. The increase in food costs has led to an **increase, in some cases up to 10%-20%, in catering vendor costs** which the ASAPs must absorb. Our ASAPs routinely need to **rely on fundraising to cover the shortfall in funding** for this crucial program.

Approval of this level of **increased funding is critical** for the Meals on Wheels and Senior Nutrition Programs throughout the Commonwealth **to serve low-income older adults already enrolled** in the program **and to provide the necessary resources to meet the increased demand** for services.

This program is **more than just a meal – it also includes nutritional screening, education, and counseling**. These meals are **medically tailored** for people with specific illnesses which **can improve health outcomes, lower the cost of health care, and increase quality of life**. Our programs also offer a **range of cultural, ethnic, and religiously tailored meals**.

Delivered daily by staff or volunteers, **Meals on Wheels serves as a wellness check** and provides what for many individuals is their only social interaction during the week. As the COVID-19 pandemic revealed, social isolation can have a dire impact on individuals – especially our most vulnerable populations.

## ***Increase Line-Item 9110-1604 by \$3.8 million to Expand the Elder Supportive Housing Program by 20 Additional Sites***

Mass Home Care requests that the Legislature approve this increased allocation which **would allow for the 61 existing and in-development affordable, supportive housing sites to be maintained** across the Commonwealth **and create 20 additional sites**.

To fully support 61 Supportive Housing sites for FY25 with an opportunity for 20 additional sites, the necessary funding level for line-item 9110-1604 is \$15,635,592.00.

Elder Supportive Housing Programs employ a **Supportive Housing Coordinator onsite** in the building who **provides tenancy preservation support and manages on-site 24/7 emergency coverage**. Supportive Housing Coordinators direct a variety of programs open to all housing site residents, including congregate meal programs, on- and off-site social activities, workshops, health clinics, and educational programs.

Elder supportive housing provides **critically important services and supports to low-income older adults** at a time when our state is facing a severe affordable housing shortage, and this program is a necessary component when addressing chronic homelessness among older adults in the Commonwealth. With approximately **7,500 units currently available**, this expansion could potentially **add 1,000 to 2,000 additional units** for low-income and housing-insecure older adults.