

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **The Florida Department of Elder Affairs Strengthens Home-Delivered Meal Assistance and the Florida Restaurant Meal Initiative**

*Additional COVID-19 Funds to Local Area Agencies on Aging Will Provide More Meals and Meal Services*

TALLAHASSEE, Fla., — The Florida Department of Elder Affairs (DOEA) distributed more than 16 million home-delivered meals last year following the onset of COVID-19. That number represents an increased distribution of over 200 percent for nearly five months, compared to the number of meals served during periods of non-emergency. As DOEA and the Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs) increased the number of home-delivered meals, the Aging Network simultaneously partnered with the Florida Restaurant and Lodging Association in launching the Feeding Older Floridians Restaurant Meal Initiative that contributed over 3.5 million meals to Florida seniors during the same time period.

Now, DOEA is reinforcing the successful home-delivered meal programs. An additional \$12.7 million in federal funding has been distributed to the 11 AAAs throughout the state to address the needs of older Floridians who remain affected by COVID-19.

“The state of Florida remains focused on the Seniors First initiative and that includes ensuring older adults have safe access to food through home-delivered meals,” **said Florida Governor Ron DeSantis**. “We’ve already been a model for the nation in making sure older individuals are prioritized for receiving vaccinations. The innovative meal programs launched by DOEA further our efforts to keep seniors first. The State of Florida and DOEA have afforded providers unprecedented program flexibility in service delivery, and the advancement of these programs helps us continue to meet those critical needs.”

“Florida’s Aging Network has shown extraordinary resourcefulness in response to COVID-19,” **said DOEA Secretary Richard Prudom**. “The launch of the Feeding Older Floridians Restaurant Meal Initiative and the tremendous expansion of home-delivered meals by the AAAs allowed seniors to continue to receive nutritious meals and provided a reduction in social isolation. We’re grateful to be continuing these hallmark programs established as new solutions to new demands. The Aging Network’s development of these new business models is a commitment to effective and efficient programs that support Florida’s senior population.”

“The Florida Restaurant and Lodging Association (FRLA) and restaurants across our great state have been proud to participate in this important meal initiative to meet the needs of Florida seniors,” **said Carol Dover, President and CEO of the Florida Restaurant and Lodging Association**. “Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, our restaurants have stepped up to help fill the critical need for senior meals, and the extension of this program will continue to allow seniors to have increased access to hot, nutritious meals from the safety of their home while simultaneously helping to support Florida’s restaurants.”

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The additional funding will allow extension of various meal delivery projects including the Feeding Older Floridians Restaurant Meal Initiative, drive-through meals, and grab-and-go meals for older adults who remain homebound. The continuation of these programs allows DOEA and the Aging Network to provide real-time responses to meet the needs of Florida's elders.

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***About the Florida Department of Elder Affairs***

The Florida Department of Elder Affairs, the State Unit on Aging, helps Florida's elders to remain healthy, safe, and independent. The Department provides most direct services through its Division of Statewide Community-Based Services, the state's eleven Area Agencies on Aging, and local service providers to deliver essential services to a vital segment of the population. For more information, please visit [www.elderaffairs.org](http://www.elderaffairs.org).

