

--- EMBARGOED TO 09/11/15 ---

**Government cuts to councils lead to scrapping of meals on wheels services all over the country.**

**The most vulnerable in our communities left without vital support.**

**National Meals on Wheels Week to celebrate vital community service next week November 9-15**

Meals on Wheels is a British institution that provides a raft of benefits to some of the country's most vulnerable citizens. It is crucial to combating a range of physical and mental illnesses and ensuring that elderly members of our communities are able to live independently for as long as possible. But all over Britain, Meals on Wheels is under severe threat from Government cuts.

November 9<sup>th</sup> – 15<sup>th</sup> is National Meals on Wheels Week – a celebration of the service up and down the country. This year's celebrations, however, will be marked by an undercurrent of fear and trepidation as it is unlikely the service will survive another round of Government cuts.

As of October 2014 over a third of the 212 top tier councils in the UK had stopped providing Meals on Wheels services to local residents, according to NACC research. We estimate that this figure is now closer to half. The Government's Comprehensive Spending Review is likely to bring with it more swingeing cuts and as meals on wheels is not protected in statutory law it is often one of the first services to be cut by councils.

Malnutrition and dehydration are both widespread problems among Britain's growing elderly population, costing the NHS billions of pounds a year. Malnutrition alone cost the country £13bn in 2008 and that cost has risen to more than £19bn this year as stated by the NHS England in their [commissioning report](#). A nutritious meal delivered daily is a key tool in combating these issues, which often lead to hospitalisation among the elderly community. Meals on Wheels delivers nutritionally balanced meals every day to people who might otherwise go without, at less than 2% of the cost of treating somebody in hospital for a day.

In addition, Meals on Wheels provides much needed human contact to people who might otherwise be totally isolated; Age UK [state](#) that the number of elderly people affected by social isolation to be around one million. The service doesn't only combat malnutrition but loneliness as well, boosting mental wellbeing as well as physical health. People who would otherwise need to live in care homes can continue to lead independent lives in their own homes. The service provides dignity for people who might skip meals either because they are struggling financially, lack the strength to prepare meals daily or the mobility to get out to the shops or other food providers.

Despite a rapidly ageing population those receiving a Meals on Wheels service has been in steady decline for the last 7 years (40% since 2009) as councils remove their provision or introduce increasingly stringent eligibility criteria in an effort to save money.

Meals on Wheels is a far cheaper alternative to looking after somebody in hospital and Government cuts are incredibly short-sighted. The average cost of Meals on Wheels per day is £3.55 whereas average cost of a patient staying in hospital for the day is £300, excluding any food, treatment or medicine.

Neel Radia, Chair of the National Association of Care Catering said:

*“Removing this vital lifeline for elderly people not only puts more pressure on our hospitals and NHS staff but is also dangerous for those who rely on the service. Maintaining good nutrition and the human contact that comes with this is key to ensuring that our elderly are able to live independently*

*in good health for as long as possible. Cutting this service puts vulnerable, elderly members of the community at risk and will also end up costing the country far more money. The service needs protecting in law.”*

Notes to Editors:

Meals on Wheels was formed in the UK in 1943 when the first meal was delivered in Hemel Hempstead

The service is not a free one but instead subsidised and despite being a necessity to most of those that use it is not enshrined in statute.

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