

Core Client Insights: Putting Your Data to Work

Laura Belazis, MPH

Senior Director, Strategy & Impact

Meals on Wheels America

Laura.Belazis@mealsonwheelsamerica.org



Raise your hand if your organization.....

- has a waitlist for meals
- has a waitlist for other services (e.g. friendly visiting, home modification/repair, etc.)
- anticipates needing a waitlist in the future
- has clients who may need different services based on their level of risk (e.g. high vs. low nutrition/food security)
- wants to better understand the impact of your services
- has a lot of data, but it can be overwhelming or hard to act on

Core Client Insights

PURPOSE: Support the Meals on Wheels Network to:

- **Screen and serve clients:** with validated, practice-tested assessment questions and risk scoring to make consistent service decisions that match individuals to the services that best meet their personalized needs and enable providers to prioritize based on risk level.
- **Demonstrate impact:** with outcome data to measure changes in clients' health and well-being with respect to nutrition, food security, loneliness, falls and hospital use.

Why is this needed?

- Older adults' needs are complex
- Increasing demand for personalization
- Demand continues to grow
- Costs have gone up
- There isn't enough funding and staff/volunteer capacity
 - 1 in 3 Meals on Wheels providers has a waitlist



Meals on Wheels America Member Priorities

From annual member surveys.....

- Using data to meet participants needs and demonstrate impact is a priority
- Half are working to improve data capture/quality/integration
- Want more learning opportunities about data
- More than half say it would be easy to add questions to their client assessment forms

How did we get here?

- We heard from you and your peers!
 - Conversations at Meals on Wheels Annual Conferences
 - State Association meetings
 - Research Advisory Committee
 - Member interviews conducted by Dr. Matthew Smith
- Landscape Assessment
 - Member intake forms
 - Validated scales
 - Conversations with related initiative leaders (GWAAR)

Summary of Key Measures

Category	Baseline screening to prioritize and serve clients	3-month and 6-month follow ups to demonstrate outcomes
Key demographic information	X	
History of chronic conditions	X	
Activities of Daily Living	X	
Food insecurity	X	X
Nutrition and malnutrition	X	X
Hospital use and falls history	X	X
Social isolation	X	
Loneliness	X	X
Improved social connection		X
Participant perceptions of impact of Meals on Wheels services on their lives		X

Core Client Insights

GOALS

1. **Serve more older adults:** e.g. Eliminate a waitlist by stratifying services (lower risk clients might receive 3 meals/week, higher risk clients receive 5 meals/week).
2. **Meet urgent needs first:** e.g. Better manage a waitlist or fast-track client onboarding using objective methods to prioritize.
3. **Apply person-centered principles** by using decision-trees to create personalized care plans.
4. **Demonstrate outcomes** – what’s working? What needs to change? What should grow?
5. **Generate strong data** to power compelling fundraising, awareness raising, partnerships and advocacy so you can serve more people.

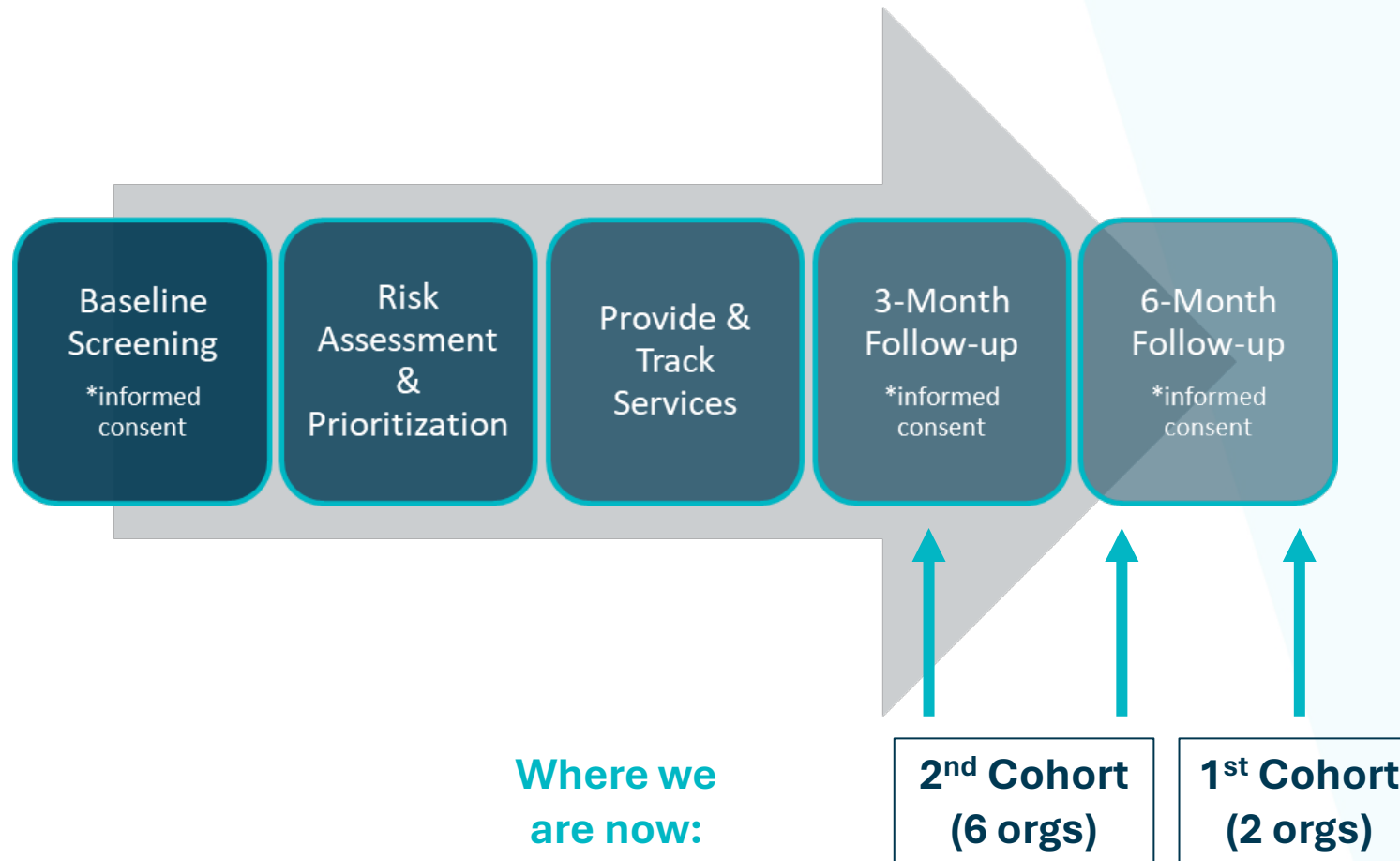
Time to Pilot!

Core Client Insights

2025 PILOT WITH MEALS ON WHEELS AMERICA MEMBERS

- Phase 1: Started March 2025
 - Meals on Wheels Orange County NC
 - Meals on Wheels Central Texas
- Phase 2: Started July 2025
 - Cumberland County Council on Older Adults
 - Meals on Wheels Rowan
 - Meals on Wheels of Davidson County
 - Meals on Wheels of Tarrant County
 - Meals on Wheels Texoma
 - Meals on Wheels South Texas

Core Client Insights Pilot – Process Flow



Risk Assessment

The Big Picture

Nutrition

- NSI DETERMINE
- Malnutrition Screening Tool
- Chewing & Swallowing



Nutrition Risk Score

Food Insecurity

- Hunger Vital Scan
- Functional Food Security



Food Insecurity Risk Score

Social Connection

- Steptoe Social Isolation Index
- Campaign to End Loneliness Tool



Social Connection Risk Score

Home Safety

- ADLs/IADLs
- Self-Reported Falls History
- Hospital & Hospice Use



Home Safety Risk Score

Scoring Example: Nutrition

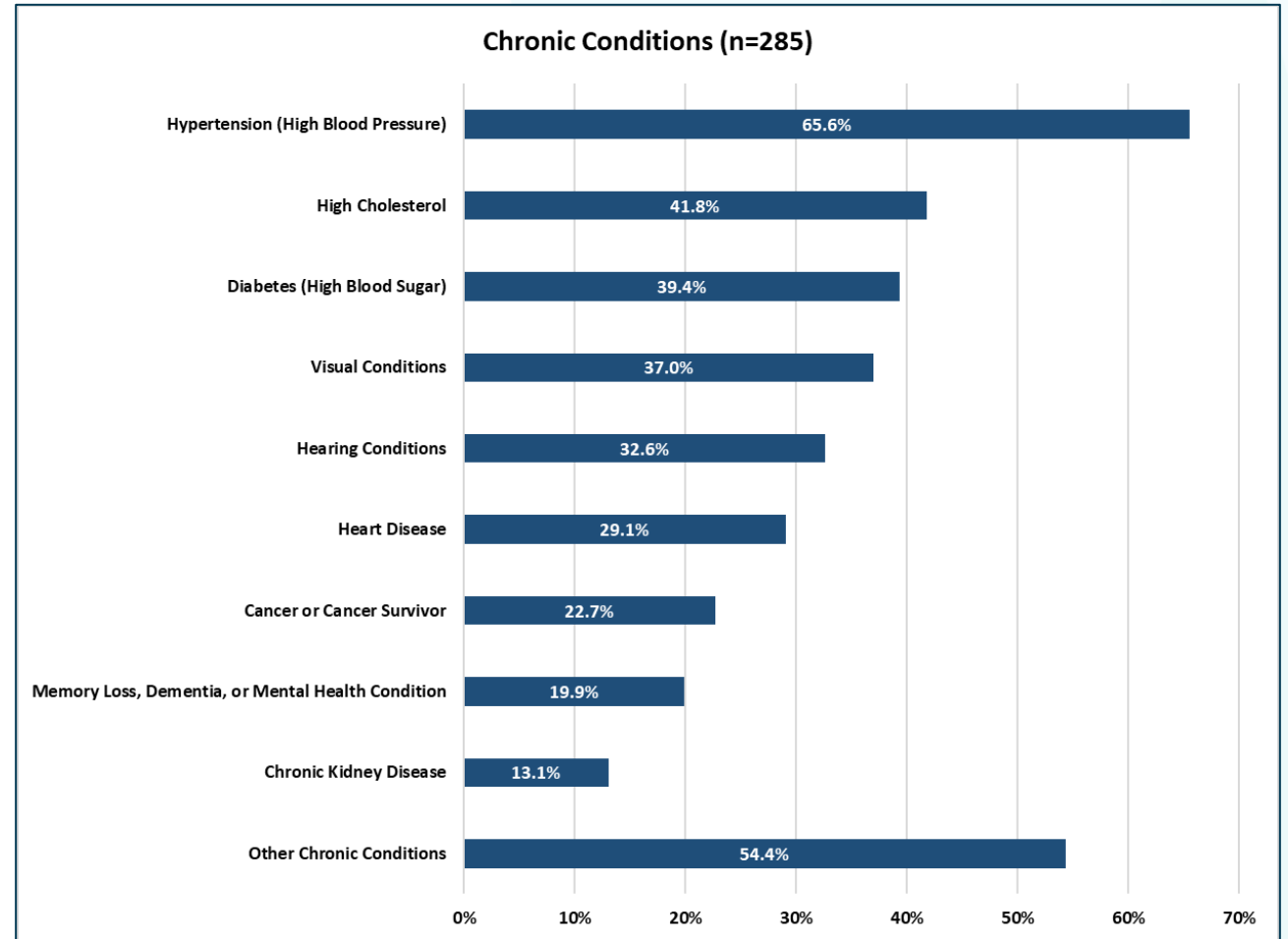
NUTRITION RISK (DETERMINE).		SCORE (MAX 21):	
Next, I'm going to read you a list of statements about your nutrition. Please tell me whether each statement is true for you.		No	YES
I have an illness or condition that made me change the kind and /or amount of food I eat.	<input type="checkbox"/> 0	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	
I eat fewer than two meals per day.	<input type="checkbox"/> 0	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	
I eat few fruits or vegetables, or milk products.	<input type="checkbox"/> 0	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	
I have three or more drinks of beer, liquor or wine almost every day.	<input type="checkbox"/> 0	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	
I have tooth or mouth problems that make it hard for me to eat.	<input type="checkbox"/> 0	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	
I don't always have enough money to buy the food I need.	<input type="checkbox"/> 0	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	
I eat alone most of the time.	<input type="checkbox"/> 0	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	
I take three or more different prescribed or over-the-counter drugs a day.	<input type="checkbox"/> 0	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	
Without wanting to, I have lost or gained 10 pounds in the last six months.	<input type="checkbox"/> 0	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	
I am not always physically able to shop, cook and/or feed myself.	<input type="checkbox"/> 0	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	
MALNUTRITION RISK: MST. Next I'll ask about your appetite and any unplanned weight loss.		SCORE (MAX 5):	
1. Have you recently lost weight without trying? <input type="checkbox"/> No (0) <input type="checkbox"/> Unsure (2) <input type="checkbox"/> Yes (go to question 1a) <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to answer [IF NEEDED: If you are unsure, some things that might indicate weight loss are clothes or rings fitting <u>looser</u> , or using a different belt notch.] 1a. If yes, how much weight have you lost? <input type="checkbox"/> 2-13 pounds (1) <input type="checkbox"/> 34 pounds or more (4) <input type="checkbox"/> 14-23 pounds (2) <input type="checkbox"/> Unsure (2) <input type="checkbox"/> 24-33 pounds (3) <input type="checkbox"/> PREFER NOT TO ANSWER	2. Have you been eating poorly because of a decreased appetite? [IF NEEDED: For example, eating less than 75% of your usual intake. Most often this is due to a <u>poor</u> appetite, but there may be other reasons sometimes such as chewing or swallowing difficulties.] <input type="checkbox"/> No (0) <input type="checkbox"/> Yes (1) <input type="checkbox"/> PREFER NOT TO ANSWER		
CHEWING AND SWALLOWING. Do you have difficulty....		SCORE (MAX 2):	
Chewing (e.g. due to missing teeth or loose dentures)?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes (1)	<input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> PREFER NOT TO ANSWER <input type="checkbox"/> DON'T KNOW
Swallowing	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes (1)	<input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> PREFER NOT TO ANSWER <input type="checkbox"/> DON'T KNOW

NUTRITION RISK	Points	Score
DETERMINE Nutrition Risk Score		
<input type="checkbox"/> Low Risk (0-2)	0	
<input type="checkbox"/> Moderate Risk (3-5)	0.5	
<input type="checkbox"/> High Risk (6 or more)	1	
MST Malnutrition Screen Score		
<input type="checkbox"/> Low Risk (0 to 1)	0	
<input type="checkbox"/> High Risk (2 to 5)	1	
Difficulty Chewing & Swallowing		
<input type="checkbox"/> Low Risk – Neither (0)	0	
<input type="checkbox"/> High Risk – Either or Both (1-2)	1	
TOTAL		___
# Nutrition Questions Missing Responses*		
RISK LEVEL: <input type="checkbox"/> High (2-3) <input type="checkbox"/> Moderate (0.5-1.5) <input type="checkbox"/> Low (0)		

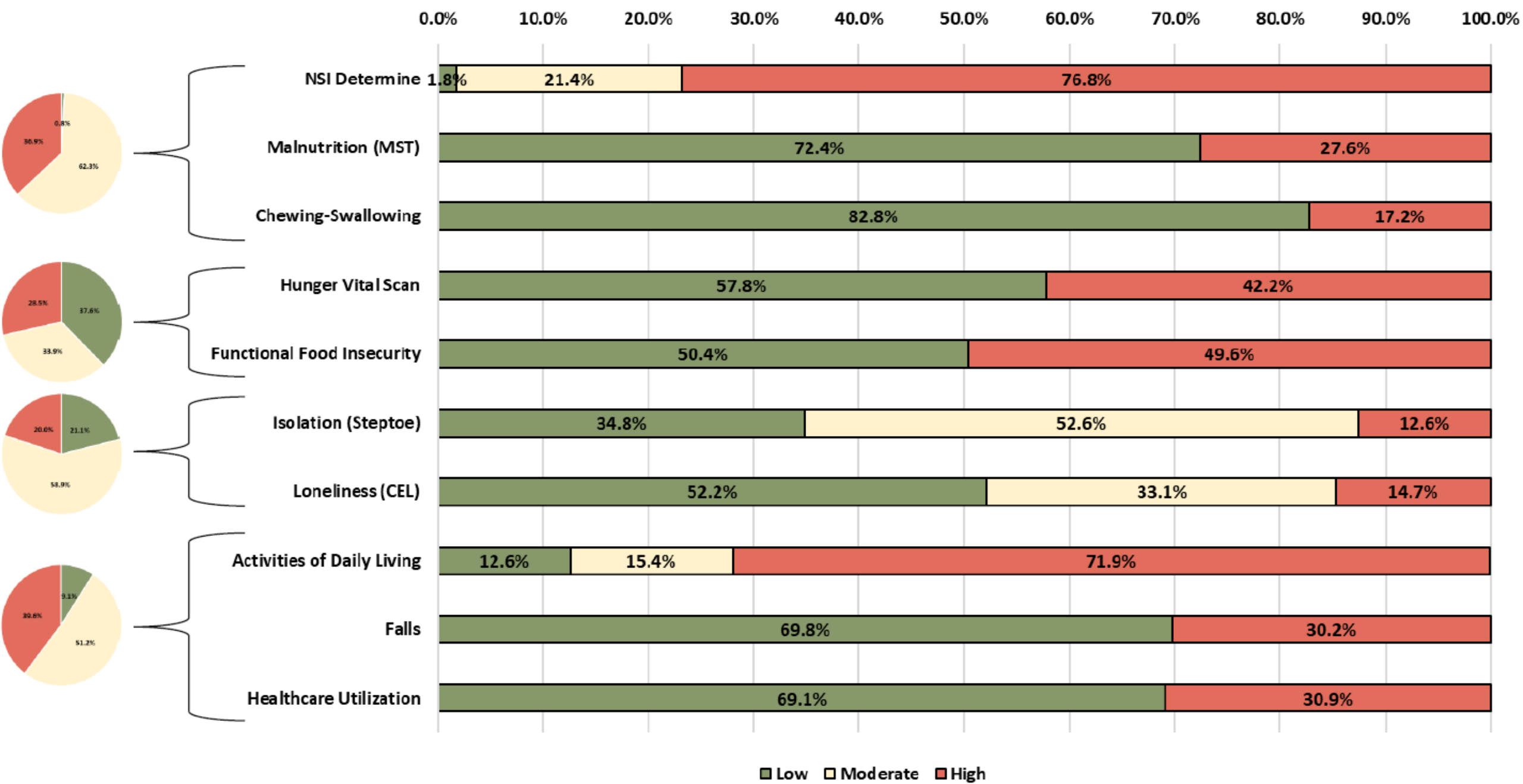
What have we seen so far?

Pilot Demographics at Baseline (n=285)

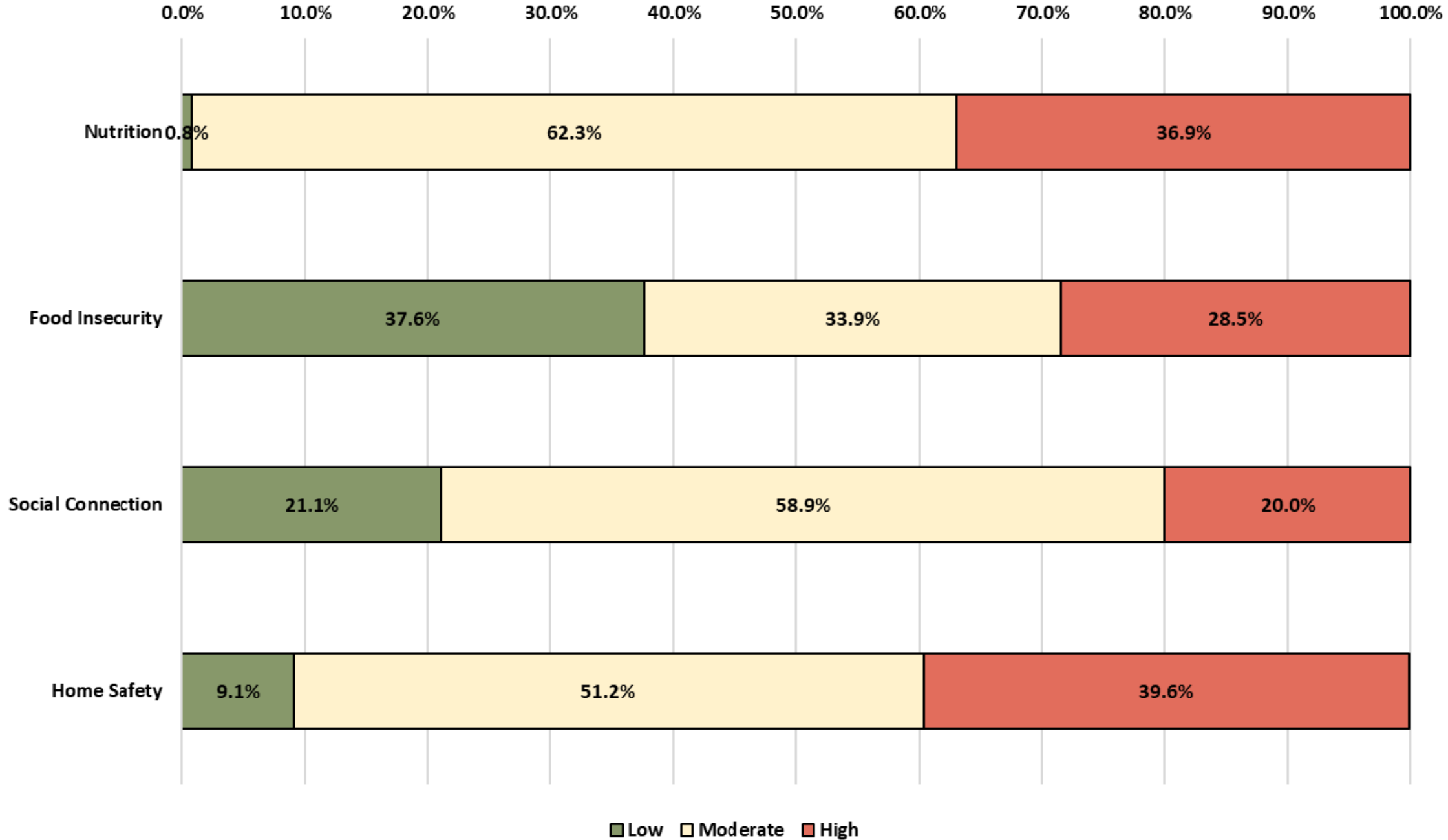
- On average, 75.1 years
- 61% female
- 11% Hispanic
- 75% White; 21% Black
- 39% lived alone
- 11% Veteran



Baseline Risk by Measure (n=285)



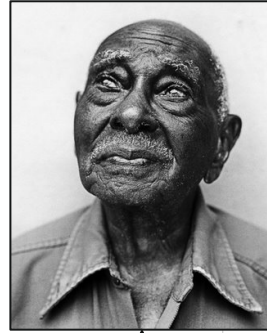
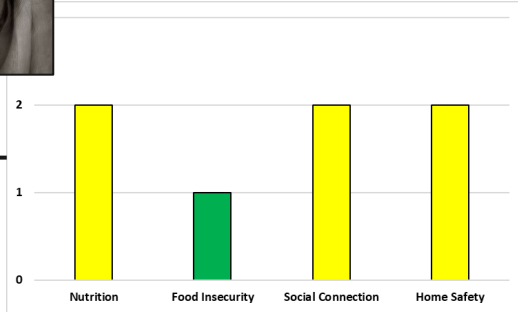
Baseline Risk Level by Concept (n=285)



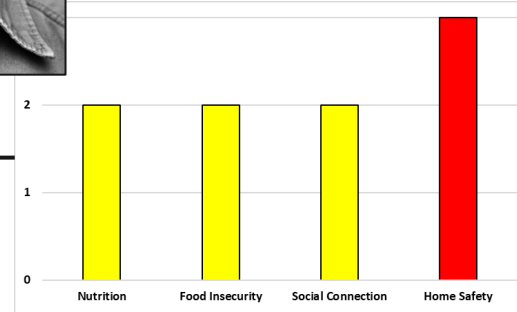
Individual Risk and Prioritization



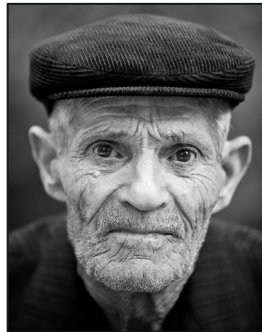
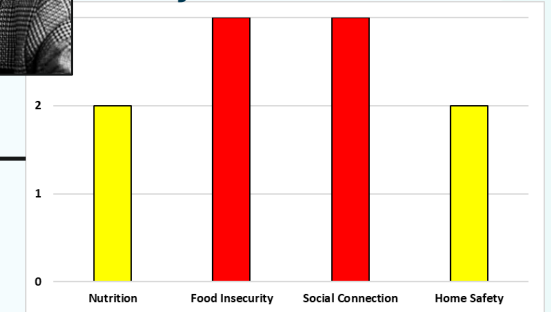
Rosa



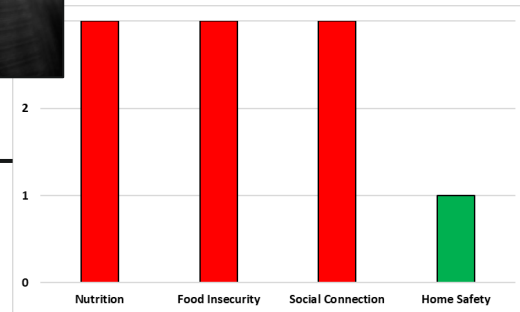
Franklin



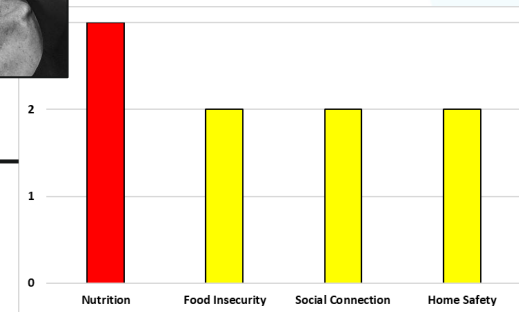
Betty



John



Maria



What benefits or use cases could you see for this in your organization's work?

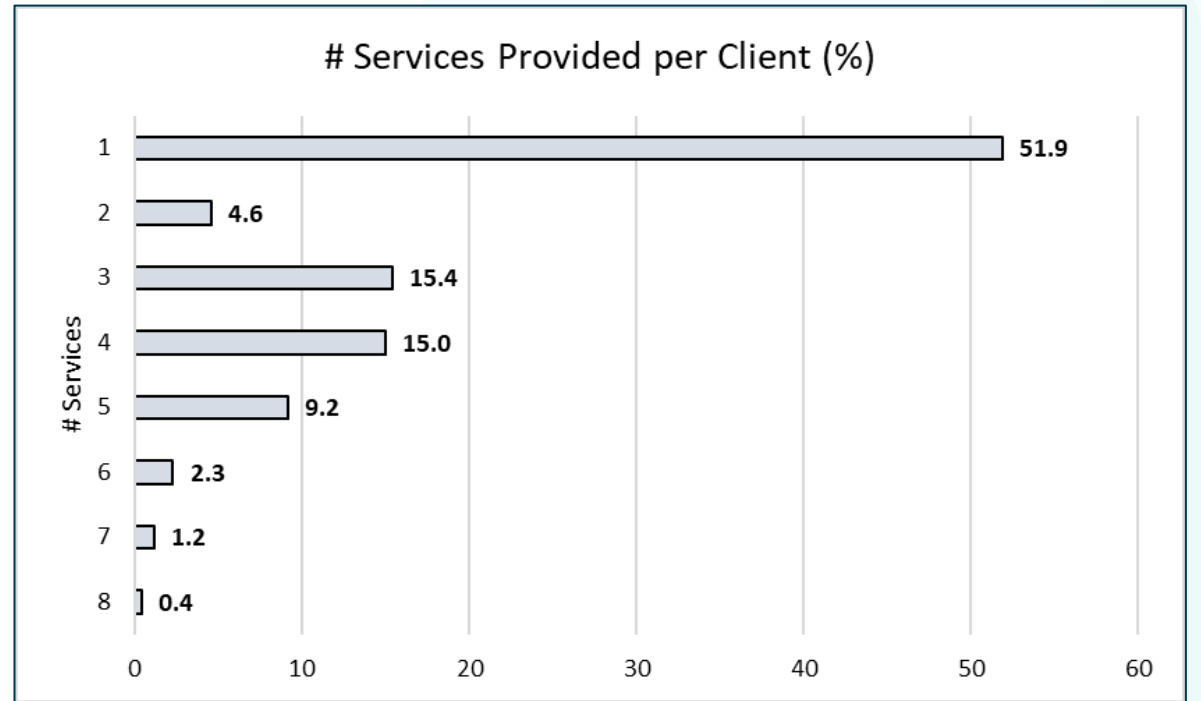


menti.com
1556 0647

Services Provided

CCI Services Provided to Clients (n=260)

Services	%
Home-delivered meals	99.6
Medically tailored meals	46.9
Nutrition Information/flyers	28.1
Cheer programs	20.8
Nutrition education	14.6
Durable medical equipment	4.6
Incontinence supplies	4.6
Minor/Major home modification/repair	4.6
Social calling	2.7
Shelf stable food/groceries or commodity food boxes	2.3
Transportation	2.3
Liquid nutrition supplement	1.9
Pet assistance	1.2
CAPABLE	1.2
In-home care	1.2
Home environment assessment	0.8
Socialization with other seniors	0.8
Heat/energy assistance	0.4
Library	0.4





Outcome Assessment



Significant Improvements from Baseline to 3-Month Follow-Up

All Matched Cases

Proportion of Clients Who Changed Over Time [for Matched Cases]

Measure	Matched Cases	Improved	Declined	Stayed Same	z	P
NSI Determine	87	55.2%	21.8%	23.0%	-4.09	<0.001
Malnutrition (MST)	92	39.1%	13.1%	47.8%	-3.14	0.002
Hunger Vital Scan	98	22.5%	14.3%	63.2%	-2.42	0.015
Functional Food Insecurity	91	35.2%	13.2%	51.6%	-2.95	0.003
Loneliness (CEL)	95	41.1%	35.8%	23.1%	-0.63	0.527
Hospitalizations	98	22.4%	8.2%	69.4%	-2.56	0.011
Falls - Injury	99	23.2%	20.2%	56.6%	-0.56	0.573

Sign-Rank Tests

Significant Improvements from Baseline to 3-Month Follow-Up

Among those At Risk at Baseline

Proportional Changes for Clients At-Risk at Baseline [matched cases]

Measure	Matched Cases	Improved	Declined	Stayed Same	z	P
NSI Determine	86	55.8%	20.9%	23.3%	-4.16	<0.001
Malnutrition (MST)	26	65.4%	7.7%	26.9%	-3.13	0.002
Hunger Vital Scan	59	37.3%	10.2%	52.5%	-3.94	<0.001
Functional Food Insecurity	46	69.6%	8.7%	21.7%	-4.59	<0.001
Loneliness (CEL)	55	70.9%	18.2%	10.9%	-3.92	<0.001
Falls - Injury	31	74.2%	6.5%	19.4%	-4.22	<0.001
Hospitalizations	30	73.3%	0.0%	26.7%	-4.69	<0.001

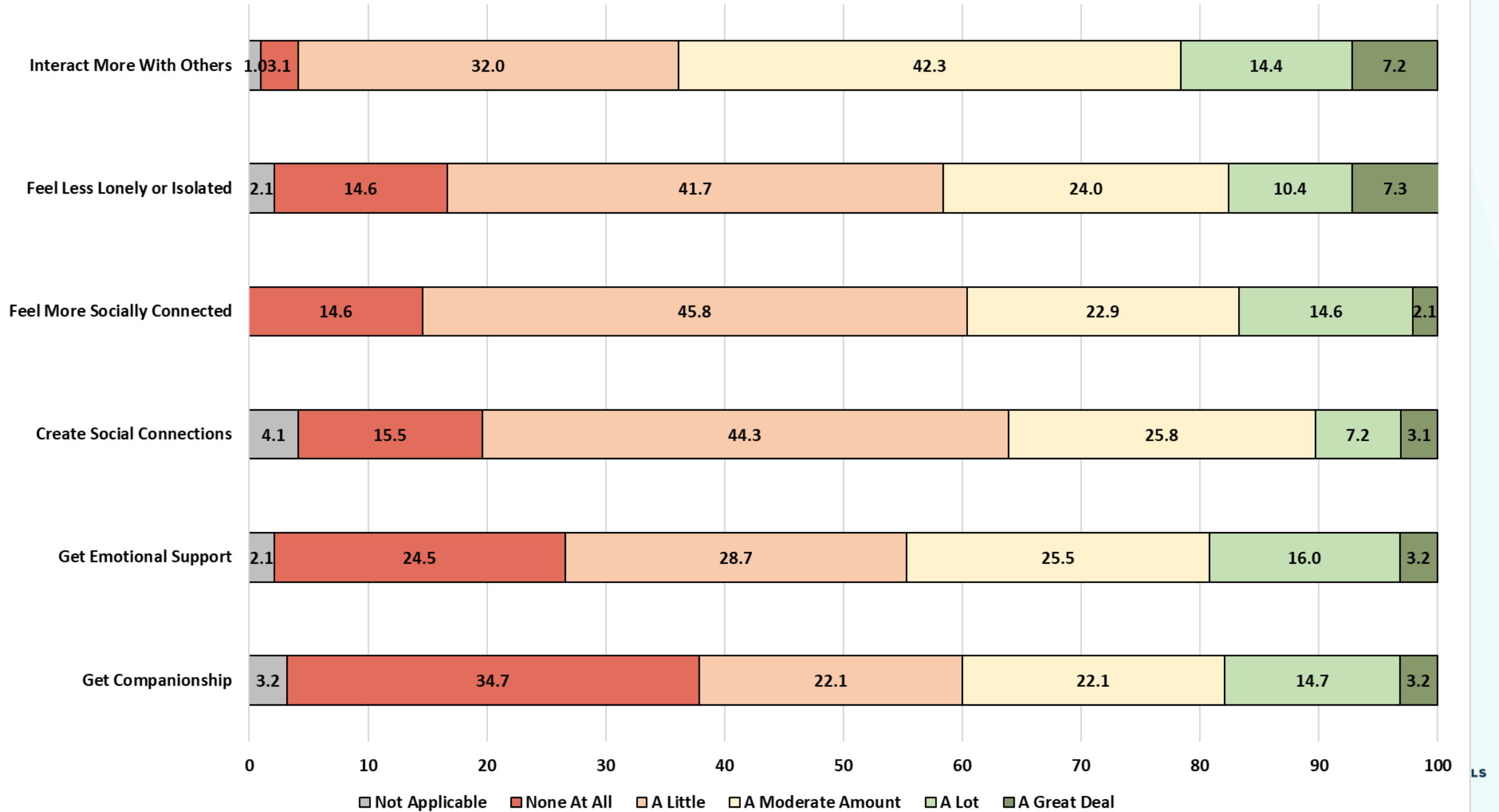
Sign-Rank Tests

R-BASIC (Post-test only)

How much has Meals on Wheels' services given you opportunity to...?

- Interact more with another person, or with other people?
- Create social connections?
- Get companionship?
- Get emotional support
- Feel more socially connected?
- Feel less lonely or isolated?

R-BASIC Item Responses (%) (n=89)



Qualitative Feedback

Can you tell me about how taking part in the meal services has made any difference to your life if at all?

In clients' own words...

- “It has made a difference in my life because I'm never gonna go hungry.”
- "Sometimes the meal I get from Meals on Wheels is the only meal I eat in a day."
- “This program has been such a blessing in my life, due to my health declining every so often these past few years, the meals are nutritious and help me stay on track.”
- “It makes me feel good knowing somebody's checking on me every day.”
- "I don't know what I'd do without Meals on Wheels. It's great help. I really like the Swedish meatballs.”
- "Just having a hot meal is a blessing, especially when I'm feeling down and depressed.”
- “I get to see a friendly face, it makes me feel better to know that someone cares about me.”

What are we hearing from Pilot organizations?



MEALS ON WHEELS
AMERICA

Early Feedback

- “As a small organization, to [revamp our client intake] on our own would have taken us years longer than the timeline of this study to do it”
- “The experience for the clients has been pretty positive. You know, they enjoy the questions. They feel like they're authentic.”
- “We're getting the information that we actually want and need as to as opposed to what we thought we wanted.”
- “CCI help put words and structure around outcomes we witness every day, showing that our program are not just meeting basic needs, but empowering seniors to continue living independently in the place they call home.”

2026 Core Client Insights Grants

2026 Core Client Insights Grants

- COMING SOON!
 - Implementation Grants
 - Cohort Leader Grants
- We expect applications will open in Q3
- Includes:
 - Seed funding to support staffing and implementation
 - Peer cohort for shared learning with experienced leaders
 - Secure system for data sharing
 - Expert guidance and analysis support
 - Implementation guide

**What resonated with you today?
What's the potential value of this?**



menti.com
1556 0647



Questions?

Other Feedback?

Laura Belazis, MPH

Senior Director, Strategy & Impact

Meals on Wheels America

Laura.Belazis@mealsonwheelsamerica.org

