



COUNCIL ON AGING
OF CENTRAL OREGON

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**The Council on Aging of Central Oregon Expands Its Meals on Wheels
Pet Pals Program**



February 3, 2023 – Bend OR – We all know that pets can be cute and playful, but what you may not have known is that they can be beneficial to their owner’s physical and mental health. Studies show that pet owners have fewer feelings of anxiety, isolation and loneliness and more opportunities to exercise and socialize. These are just a few reasons

the Council on Aging of Central Oregon (CoA) is expanding its Pet Pals program across the tri-county.

The Pet Pals program currently delivers free pet food and supplies on a monthly basis to Meals on Wheels participants in Bend, La Pine, and Sisters. CoA also covers the cost of wellness visits and provides a stipend for veterinary care. The program serves 52 seniors and will begin working with local partners in Madras to increase those numbers in the upcoming months.

Susan Rotella, Executive Director of the Council on Aging of Central Oregon says, “In some cases, a pet may be a senior’s only companion. There are many instances where seniors on fixed incomes are prioritizing the care and feeding of their pets over their own needs. This makes the Pet Pals program essential to the health and well-being of both the Meals on Wheels seniors and their pets in the communities we serve.”

This selflessness is well documented. Meals on Wheels America conducted a research study in 2021 that revealed 21% of Meals on Wheels pet owners went without food in order to feed their pets and 48% did not have anyone except Meals on Wheels to help with their pet needs. In response to the growing need for support, the Council on Aging hired a Pet Pals manager, Stacy Eidler, to manage and expand the program.

A team of volunteers makes deliveries and checks in on homebound seniors every third Saturday, which provides another opportunity to conduct a wellness check per month. Other volunteers drive participants and their pets to vet clinics for services like spay and neuter, wellness checks, vaccines, and nail trims. **FIXBend, a Rawley Project Program,** and **Wickiup Animal Hospital** are key CoA partners, offering low cost care as needed to 89 animals including cats, dogs and a cockatiel.

CoA has also developed partnerships with **Furry Friends Foundation** to provide food and supplies in Sisters, **Heartwarmers** to make animal toys and beds, and the **Hope Foundation**, which helps to coordinate in-home visits by veterinarians. Stacy Eidler notes that “feeding and providing veterinary care for people and their companions is a true community effort.”

This program is funded by grants from Meals on Wheels America and Deschutes County. As the program expands, CoA is looking for more volunteers across the tri-county, and is accepting monetary donations as well as donations of new leashes, collars, harnesses,

cat litter, litter boxes, Purina cat chow complete, Fancy Feast canned cat food, Purina One canned dog food, Cesar wet dog food, and treats for cats and dogs.

Donations are accepted at www.councilonaging.org/donate, through CoA's [Amazon Wish List](#), or can be dropped off at CoA offices at 500 Greenwood Avenue in Bend. Individuals interested in volunteering for any of the Council on Aging programs can apply online at www.councilonaging.org/volunteer.

About the Council on Aging of Central Oregon

Since 1975, the Council on Aging of Central Oregon (CoA) has served as the designated Area Agency on Aging for Deschutes, Crook, and Jefferson counties, offering adults aged 60 and older and their loved ones a range of support services. CoA advocates for, empowers, and guides older adults and their loved ones to live with independence and well-being.

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