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Meals on Wheels to get stimulus aid

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Nonprofit organizations that deliver meals to shut-ins will soon get a \$500,000 chunk of President Obama's economic stimulus money.

About \$485,000 will be sent to Hawai'i for nutritional assistance as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009.

The grant will help Lanakila Meals on Wheels take on some of the 300 people who have been on the group's waiting list, said Brandon Mitsuda, Lanakila Meals on Wheels deputy director. On a daily basis, the group's volunteers deliver meals to 750 qualified senior citizens around O'ahu.

"Right now we're having such a hard time because of the economic downturn," Mitsuda said. "We have 300 seniors on a waiting list, and what's stopping them from coming in is funding."

Another nonprofit that delivers meals, Hawai'i Meals on Wheels, serves anyone who is homebound and unable to provide a meal for themselves, said Claire Shimabukuro, program administrator. Each day, the group delivers 250 hot meals to people from 'Ewa Beach to Waimanalo, Mililani to Kane'ohe.

Shimabukuro was hopeful that her program will receive some of the stimulus funds, but knows that the amount depends on how the city divvies up the funds.

"We rely on volunteer labor to help with the meals," Shimabukuro said. "We sometimes don't have enough volunteers."

"But of late, we've seen a rise in the number of volunteers. Many are recently laid off and want to do something, and for others it's about a sense of wanting to give back to the community."
