

Nutrition Services Stakeholders Meeting Minutes
February 25, 2022
1:00 pm

Department of Aging and Disability Services
55 Farmington Avenue
Hartford, CT 06105

Meeting began at 1:05 PM.

Meeting Participants

TEAMS: Jannett Haughton, Margaret A. Gerundo-Murkette - SUA
Aaron Pratt – ESCS, Stan Mingione – ESCS, Michael Hebert - WCAAA, Laura Robbins – ESCS. Robyn Harper-Gulley – NCAAA, Giacomo Daniel R.- SNAP Program Administration Manager DSS, Katie Pachkovsky – End Hunger CT, Maureen McIntyre – NCAAA, Denise Andreas - SWCAA, Erin Harkrader – LifeBridge, K. Chase -Senior Resources (ECAAA) , Marie Allen - SWCAA, Marissa Karp – CT Community Care, Jennifer Cavallaro - Community Options Unit Division of Health Services.

Following the welcome and introduction, the purpose of the meetings was reiterated.

A brief update from previous meetings was given followed by the successes and challenges during COVID -19, re-opening of congregate cafés, the opportunities that came out of the pandemic including changes to the Nutrition program, new initiatives and use of technology.

Discussion:

- Regarding the reopening of cafés, providers mentioned that many cafés are still not yet opened fully. Some started to reopen but had to close due to the uptick of Delta and Omicron strain of the COVID -19 virus. In one Elderly Nutrition Provider's (ENP) region, some cafés are seeing increased participation while in another region, there has been a decline in participation, even prior to COVID.
- A question was raised regarding who the seniors are that we are serving now and what they want, and menu choice was one response. Elderly nutrition providers shared that they would like to offer menu choices but are concerned about the cost of this and the anticipated waste that could result. Additionally, caterers often are only limited to doing one kind of meal each day.
- Food costs have increased. Meal providers have seen an increase in surcharges. One ENP experienced a 9% increase from a caterer due to these increased food costs.
- Some rural cafes have struggled with a decline in the number of older senior volunteers who are able to assist, resulting in a shortage of assistance and inability to provide service.
- Some senior centers are moving towards having their own lunch program, which is not funded by Title III, where residents pay privately.
- The ENPs shared that there is a continued low reimbursement rate that is affecting program operations.
- Client donations have decreased because cafés have not been open.
- American Rescue Plan funds have supported innovation and flexibility with meals but there is concern about sustainability when this flexibility and when these funding levels change at the end of 2024.
- ENPs shared that transportation (provider vehicles) and the high cost of maintenance for older vehicles is a huge challenge. One ENP shared that this resulted in a waiting list for delivering meals.

Innovations

- The group considered what a new kind of café might look like. This includes flexibility of meal service hours and menus, more culturally and medically tailored meals, the opportunity from the Administration for Community Living to continue “Grab and Go” service after the pandemic, and outdoor dining.
- “Grab and Go” meal service alongside outside dining has been an innovation during COVID. One provider shared they had made some renovations to outdoors to accommodate this.
- Related to this, dining in an outdoor space such as a parking lot with entertainment during warm weather may be another option.
- Consider working with municipal Parks and Recreation departments, which is being promoted nationally, to utilize park space for outdoor activities.

Next Steps,

Revisit the transportation/provider vehicle issue at the next meeting.

Meeting dates

Our next meeting will be held on Tuesday, May 24, 2022, at 1:00pm – 2:30pm.

The meeting ended at 12:15 pm.