

Nutrition Services Stakeholder Meeting February 20, 2024

Attendance: Erin Estey (SUA), Shana Brierley (SUA), Theresa Rivera (Department of Social Services), Nancy Isa (CRT), Rose Booker (CW Resources), Alison Dvorak (ECAAA), Tania Parrent (LifeBridge), Mallory Daley (CAFCA), Sue Hamilton (AASCC), Ellen Torgerson (AASCC), Denise Andreas (SWCAA), Rick Liegl (City of Meriden), Gretchen James (SWCAA), Maureen Neuberger (Catholic Charities of Fairfield County), Kathy Chase (ECAAA), Josh Kelly (TVCCA), Christian Duborg (CWCSEO), Marie Allen (SWCAA), Nicole Ginsburg (Mark Twain Congregate), Jamie Smith (Department of Agriculture), Dan Giacomi (Director of Program Oversight at DSS), Joel Sekorski (City of Torrington), Jillian Ruisi (TEAM), In-Jee Lee (City of Hartford)

Welcome and Introduction

J. Smith gave updates regarding the Farmer's Market Nutrition Program, as she needed to sign off from the meeting early. Last year, the Farmer's Market program switched from paper coupons or vouchers to a card-based system. There were some hiccups, and there will be some changes in the coming year to work around some of those things. There will be a webinar for returning and new participating senior distribution sites on Thursday, March 21 from 10:30am – 12:30pm. J. Smith advised that the program has the benefit capacity to take on some additional senior nutrition distribution sites, so if anyone is interested in being a site, please reach out. [Webinar Registration](#) Per J. Smith, Allison Hughes is the point of contact for the program. Allison.Hughes@ct.gov

Public Comment

None

Update and Recap

E. Estey recapped prior meeting minutes.

Nutrition Task Force

E. Estey advised that the legislative Nutrition Task Force has concluded and the co-chairs are working on drafting recommendations based on the discussions during Task Force meetings. Some major points of discussion during the Task Force were timing of payments (both from SUA to AAAs and AAAs to ENPs), data collection, streamlining of processes, and federal and state funding. SUA will see what the finalized recommendations look like and share with the group at the next Stakeholder meeting.

Federal Funding Update

The federal government is currently under Continuing Resolution #3. There is no finalized, approved federal budget and therefore, states cannot access the full amount of their OAA allocation. States receive small pots of money intended to carry through the time of the CR. In this case, CR #3 takes us through early March. It has been several years since we went to CR #3. As SUA receives Notices of Award, the Area Agencies on Aging receive their allocations of funding.

E. Estey also advised that the Administration for Community Living has updated the Older Americans Act regulations for the first time since 1988, so there may be some programmatic changes. SUA is looking

through the regulations now – regulations go into effect in March 2024 with implementation by October 2025, so policies and procedures will be updated, and SUA will share that information as it becomes available. It was noted that there may be some changes around prioritization and C1 grab-and-go meals. K. Chase asked if there would be additional funding from the feds associated with these updates, and noted that demand already outpaces resources, and allowing C1 funds to be utilized for this will further stress the system. E. Estey advised that there are no planned increases to funding that SUA is aware of and all indications are that the program will continue to be flat-funded at pre-COVID funding levels.

Food Safety Training

S. Brierley shared that on January 23, CANASP hosted a site manager food safety training at which she did a training for all of the site managers in the state. She advised that if there are site managers that did not attend the training and do not have their own standalone food safety certification, Elderly Nutrition Programs need to make arrangements for the site manager to have training. S. Brierley advised that the training was recorded, and she can provide the recording if needed. She also advised that a second training module will be presented later in the year. K. Chase asked she be told when this is scheduled as she was not told in advance of food safety training, to which S. Brierley advised that she would.

E. Estey reminded attendees that the training is a carve-out in the statutory language in the food code, and that without the training, site managers would need to have their own food safety certification. E. Estey also advised that programs may want to maintain the training record and the corresponding statutory language on hand for health department inspections, as many health departments are not aware of the provision. E. Estey also reminded everyone that it is the responsibility of the ENPs to ensure that their site managers are up to date on and in compliance with their training.

A. Dvorak advised that there are many ENPs or AAAs who have ServSafe proctors on staff, so if someone wants to take the food safety certification exam, there are many proctors who can administer the exam.

Weather Closures

E. Estey reminded the ENPs in attendance that they should alert their AAA immediately upon deciding to close the program for the day due to inclement weather, as the AAAs need to report this information to the SUA.

Senior Nutrition Program Month

S. Brierley shared that March is Senior Nutrition Program Month, per the Administration for Community Living. This year's theme is "Connection in Every Bite" recognizing the importance of the program in socialization and connection for older adults. ACL's website has a lot of good information about the celebration ([Dedicated Celebration Page](#) and [Kick-Off Webinar](#)). S. Brierley asked if any programs are doing anything in observance of Senior Nutrition Program Month.

Per A. Dvorak, Senior Resources will be building these celebrations into events throughout the month, including celebrations of the 50-year anniversary of the state's Area Agencies on Aging.

Invitations and Attendance

E. Estey reminded attendees to share meeting invitations with anyone they deem appropriate, and send E. Estey and S. Brierley any names and contact information for those they would like added to the regular invitations.

Other Business/Discussion

A. Dvorak raised that during Nutrition Task Force meetings, the subject of SNAP utilization for Elderly Nutrition Program participants has been raised. She asked what programs and providers are doing around SNAP with Elderly Nutrition Program participants.

E. Estey noted that the application can be very daunting for an older adult, based on its length.

E. Torgerson advised that as the Title III Nutrition assessor for Home Delivered Meal consumers, when she is doing initial assessments or reassessments with consumers, she has heard that people don't want to do all of the work to get low benefit amounts, but she lets them know the advantages of SNAP, what can be purchased with SNAP, and helps them to complete applications, which has been very successful for Agency on Aging of South Central Connecticut.

D. Giacomi remarked that this is helpful information for him to hear, as the Director of Program Oversight at DSS, which specifically deals with SNAP. He advised that many people are not aware of a specific program for older adults called the Elderly Simplified Application Project (ESAP) which, once an older adult is approved, extends approval for SNAP benefits for 36 months without a recertification being required. This helps to lessen the administrative burden on the older adult and makes the SNAP program more accessible. This can be used even if an older adult is raising minor grandchildren – the only thing that would impact it is someone in the home receiving earned income. For more information: [SNAP ESAP](#).

R. Liegl advised that his biggest concern is always those who don't get fed or are on waitlists for a long period of time, and asked if the number of people needing programs has decreased. Per E. Estey, numbers of those looking for services has continued to increase since the start of COVID, and it does not appear that numbers will decline any time soon.

Next Meeting Tuesday, May 14, 1:00-2:30pm

Meeting Recording: [Nutrition Services Stakeholder Meeting Recording](#)