

**Nutrition Services Stakeholder Meeting  
May 13, 2025**

Attendance: Erin Estey (ADS-BOA), Shana Brierley (ADS-BOA), Allison Hughes (CT Dept of Ag), Theresa Rivera (DSS), Christian Duborg (CWCSEO), Cassandra Norfleet-Johnson (DSS), Alison Dvorak (Senior Resources), Christopher Blancarte (Senior Resources), Kathy Chase (Senior Resources), Ellen Torgerson (AASCC), Robyn Harper-Gulley (NCAAA), Maria Buontempo (AASCC), Emily Marble (AASCC), Gretchen James (SWCAA), Denise Andreas (SWCAA), Natasha Tetreault (Town of Enfield), Nancy Isa (CRT), Gariann Chiarella (New Opportunities, Inc), Lisa Labonte (Consultant), Jillian Ruisi (TEAM), Laura Palmieri (RW Solutions), Rose Booker (RW Solutions), Katrina Bresnahan (CAFCA), Lorri Lennon (CRT), Margareth Aviz (TEAM), Anthony Sanchez (WCAAA), Jose Carchi Maposito (WCAAA), Rick Liegl (City of Meriden), Andre Scott (City of Hartford), Monica Stromwell (CT Housing Partners)

**Public Comment**

None.

**Presentation – New Opportunities, Inc. “Conexion” Program**

L. Labonte and G. Chiarella presented on the Conexion program run by NOI, which is the result of a replication-D grant from the Administration for Community Living received in 2021. The grant and project were a way to reach older adults living within a specific zip code in Waterbury which has traditionally been very hard to reach. The population has not been able to access senior centers or congregate meal sites in the area due to lack of transportation, financial resources, limited English proficiency, and the area being a food desert. A previous food truck project could not fully meet the needs due to limited time and capacity.

While many older adults were receiving home delivered meals, there was no opportunity for socialization or connection to other services. The Conexion program was intended to reach those older adults who had no other access to the Senior Nutrition Program.

NOI did surveys and interviews at all of the senior housing buildings in the zip code to learn what the challenges were and what the older adults wanted and needed. Through community partnerships with YMCA, Brass City Harvest, local restaurants, and other community organizations, the Conexion program offered classes including English as a Second Language, Spanish as a Second Language, nutrition education, cooking for diet-related needs, and computer use. There was huge interest in the program and at one time, 600 clients were registered for the program. Participants received a keytag card loaded with meals which they could use at local partner restaurants, and in this way, NOI tracked the meals.

While the program was incredibly successful while there was funding available, as the grant funding has waned, NOI has needed to cut back on service levels, though they are working to sustain the program. G. Chiarella can be reached at [gchiarella@newoppinc.org](mailto:gchiarella@newoppinc.org) and L. Labonte can be reached at [llabonte@catmatt.com](mailto:llabonte@catmatt.com).

**Christian Duborg – Commission on Women, Children, Seniors, Equity and Opportunity**

C. Duborg spoke about the Commission on Women, Children, Seniors, Equity and Opportunity (CWCSEO, or “the Commission”), explaining that CWCSEO is a legislative commission of the general assembly, the

purpose of which is to provide non-partisan data and recommendations about policies that affect the identified populations.

C. Duborg explained that while most policy analysts at the Commission oversee a particular identified population, he oversees the food and nutrition policy overall. There are three main components of his work:

1. Coordination and collaboration: working with the government and non-governmental organizations who work in the food space to make it easier for organizations to know about each other.
2. Public-facing resources: the Commission maintains a database of food organizations in Connecticut with maps that provide the information, and also elevates events that concern food access with a focus on culturally-connected food access.
3. Policy: C. Duborg provides policy support, drafts testimony, and provides data to legislators upon request, all of which helps to inform the policy-making process.

There is a yearly report that the Commission produces on food insecurity, which evaluates the publicly available data, academic published research, and community input to make recommendations on ways to reduce food insecurity. There is a community survey that collects data from community organizations and individuals, and C. Duborg invited any non-profit providers on the call to complete the survey and provide feedback about the work they do.

### **Older Americans Act Reauthorization**

E. Estey advised that the Older Americans Act (OAA) has still not been reauthorized, and at this time, there is no indication of when that will be done. With the priorities of the federal government right now, the OAA reauthorization appears to have fallen down the list of legislation to be addressed, though there is still the desire among many parties including members of the legislature. The state is still able to receive OAA funding without the Act being reauthorized, and the Bureau of Aging (BOA) is still working to come into compliance with the OAA Final Rule regulations that were codified last year, with compliance required by 10/1/25. The BOA will be issuing some new Program Instructions which detail these policies and procedures.

### **Federal Funding**

E. Estey advised that the state has not received the Notices of Award (NOAs) for the remainder of Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2025 funds, and explained that the last Continuing Resolution ended 3/14/25, and the funds for the Continuing Resolution through 9/30/25 have not yet been received. E. Estey indicated that communications from the Administration for Community Living (ACL) indicated that NOAs should be received by 5/17/25, and BOA will work to get funds out to the Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs) as quickly as possible after NOAs are received. Funding for FFY25 will be flat and at FFY24 levels.

E. Estey also advised that while there is conjecture and speculation about the budget for FFY26 and the associated OAA funding, as well as reorganization at the Department of Health and Human Services, which includes ACL, BOA does not currently have information to share. BOA is keeping in close contact with AAAs and sharing information as it becomes available. Providers were reminded to stay in budget as much as possible, as there will be no additional funding to provide, and ensures that only eligible consumers are receiving meals.

## **State Funding and SNAP**

E. Estey shared that the budget for State Fiscal Year (FFY) 2026 has not yet been passed, however, it appears that State funding for Nutrition will continue at the level of SFY25 through SFY26 and SFY27. It appears that the \$1.5M in additional State funding that was provided in the SFY25 budget will be continued.

There is a bill to maximize the use of SNAP benefits by older adults using the Senior Nutrition Program, which, if passed, will primarily be a DSS project and include a Restaurant Program component, but we do not yet know if this will be passed.

E. Estey reminded attendees that the Connecticut Association for Community Action presented at a previous meeting about SNAP and SNAP outreach, and provided a listing of the SNAP outreach coordinators for each region of the state, and also advised that if a provider needs that listing, to please reach out and it will be provided.

## **State Performance Report**

E. Estey shared that the State Performance Report (SPR), which is a compilation of the data collected in the state and provided to ACL for review, has been certified. The SPR shows the federal government the services that were provided to older adults, and the demographics of those who were served, and is intended to show how funds are being spent, and that we are serving priority populations (those at greatest economic need and greatest social need).

E. Estey provided some data on the Nutrition program:

1. In FFY24, 1,875,989 meals served to 20,868 individuals:
  - a. 1,470,438 home delivered meals to 8,327 consumers
  - b. 405,551 congregate meals to 12,541 consumers
2. Over 5,300 meal program participants were over 85 years old
3. Estimated over 8,000 people received Nutrition Ed, almost 800 received Nutrition Counseling
4. Of HDM consumers
  - a. 63% over the age of 75
  - b. 23.75% at or below FPL
  - c. 52.96% live alone
  - d. 65.74% at high nutrition risk
  - e. 16.43% needing assistance w/3 or more Activities of Daily Living
  - f. 72.27% needing assistance w/3 or more Instrumental Activities of Daily Living
5. Of congregate consumers:
  - a. 59.8% over the age of 75
  - b. 18% at or below FPL
  - c. 48.87% live alone
  - d. 19.63% at high nutrition risk

D. Andreas requested that data be provided to attendees, and E. Estey indicated that BOA will work on consolidating some of the SPR data into a useable format and provide to the attendees on the call. A. Dvorak added that an infographic that could be shared more widely would be helpful as well.

## **Wait Lists and Prioritization**

S. Brierley reminded everyone that if an ENP puts a wait list into place, they need to inform the AAA that oversees the program of that wait list so that they can inform the BOA. E. Estey explained that BOA receives questions from the Office of the Governor and the legislature, and being aware of what is going on across the state, and where wait lists exist, helps to provide the most up-to-date information and highlight the importance and challenges of the program. The intention is not to create problems for a program that has a wait list, it is simply to be informed.

S. Brierley told attendees that there is still the desire to work on a prioritization tool which could help providers to prioritize consumers if there is a wait list, but the BOA hopes that providers will assist in identifying what is important for them in prioritizing consumers and what the tool should include. Anyone who is interested in participating can reach out to BOA.

## **Other Discussion**

A. Hughes shared that the Senior Farmer's Market Nutrition Program (SFMNP) is getting up and running for the 2025 farmer's market season. There is more demand for cards than there is funding, and the Department of Agriculture is waiting for information on additional funding to see if more cards can be issued. If any providers need more information, they can contact A. Hughes at [allison.hughes@ct.gov](mailto:allison.hughes@ct.gov).

E. Estey closed the meeting, reminding participants that if there is anything that they wish to add to an agenda, please let BOA know.

## **2025 Meeting Schedule**

- Tuesday, August 12 at 1:00pm
- Tuesday, November 18 at 1:00pm (shifted for Veteran's Day)