Restaurant Option for the
Older Californians Nutrition Program

Guidance for Area Agencies on Aging

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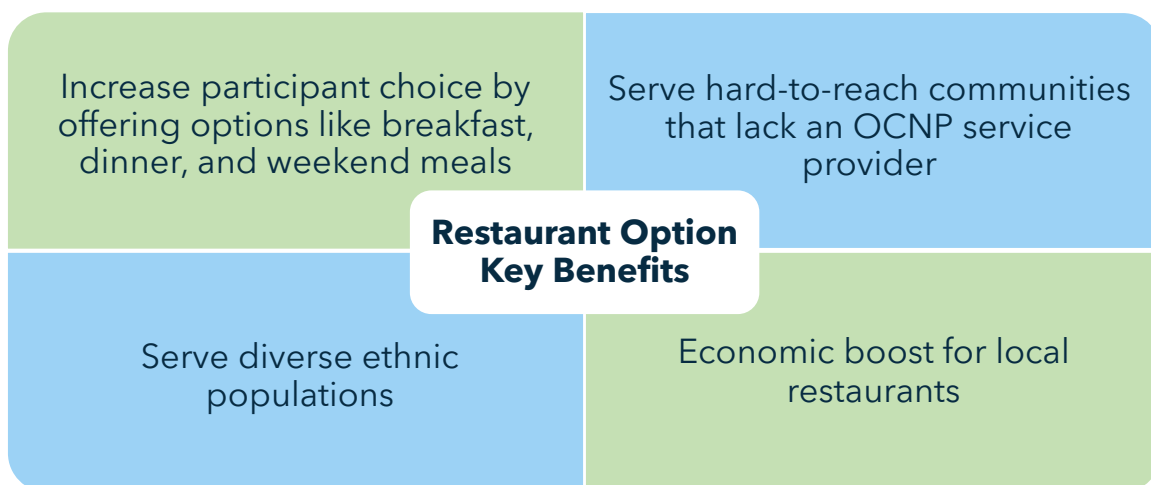
Background and Purpose

The Older Californians Nutrition Program (OCNP) Restaurant Option (RO) Guidance includes instruction to assist Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs) and their nutrition providers to streamline the development of the RO for their communities. Collaborating with licensed foodservice establishments like restaurants, food trucks, cafés, and grocery stores with hot and cold food options provides choice and nutritious meal options for older Californians and helps to expand services to meet the needs of diverse populations and underserved communities. The primary goals of the RO include:

- Provide choice, quality, and nutritious meal options to older Californians.
- Expand dining options, delivery methods, and food selections to meet the needs of diverse older Californians and serve communities that lack OCNP nutrition services.
- Support local economies and foodservice establishments.

Key benefits associated with the RO include:

Increase participant choice by offering options like breakfast, dinner, and weekend meals	Serve hard-to-reach communities that lack an OCNP service provider
Restaurant Option Key Benefits	
Serve diverse ethnic populations	Economic boost for local restaurants

Partnerships that enable AAAs and nutrition providers to collaborate and meet the nutrition needs of diverse older Californians can fill a gap to meet the meal and socialization needs of older adults. Benefits to such collaborations include:

- Restaurants may be more willing to work with an AAA or nutrition provider Registered Dietitian (RD) to utilize or modify existing menus to offer meal choices that meet cultural meal preferences.
- With more expansive days and hours of operation than most OCNP meal sites, restaurant collaborations can reach a younger generation of older adults who value menu options and dining hour choices.
- A restaurant partnership can target urban neighborhoods that may lack accessible transportation or small rural communities without an OCNP meal site.
- Grocery stores and hospital cafés may also be considered to expand RO partnership options.

Restaurant Option Service Models

Under the RO, there are two service models that AAAs and nutrition providers can implement:

- Meals served at a designated timeframe with nutrition program staff or a volunteer present at mealtime.
  - Benefits: staff or volunteers onsite allow for direct implementation of programmatic elements such as intake process and determining eligibility, sign-in process, orientation of new participants, collection of voluntary contributions, and providing nutrition education.
  - Considerations: limits flexibility of dining options for participants.

- Meals served at an unrestricted mealtime offered during restaurant operating hours and may include the option of different serving times such as breakfast, dinner, and weekends. Nutrition program staff or volunteers are not present during mealtime.
  - Benefits: maximum dining flexibility for participants.
  - Considerations: requires AAA or nutrition provider to establish an off-site system to complete programmatic elements which include intake process and determining eligibility, authentication of meal counts, orientation of new participants, providing nutrition education, and collection of voluntary contributions; places more responsibility on restaurant staff to provide data for reporting purposes.

- With either model, AAAs and nutrition providers can provide eligible clients with vouchers (paper or electronic) to be exchanged for meals at designated restaurants.

The general requirements for Title IIIC meals apply to the RO in accordance with the Older Americans Act (OAA) and California Code of Regulations (CCR). This includes:

1. Provide meals that follow the current Dietary Guidelines for Americans (DGA) and provide one-third of the Dietary Reference Intakes (DRI) in each meal as documented in the OCNP Menu Guidance.
2. Comply with the California Retail Food Code (CRFC) for food safety and sanitation standards.

Fruits   Vegetables   Dairy   Grains   Protein

Step-by-Step Guide to Implement the Restaurant Option

The following optional steps can help guide AAAs and nutrition providers in RO Planning:

1. Initiate a strategic planning process:
   - Bring together a planning team that includes internal (dietitian, OCNP staff) and external (local restaurant or grocery store staff, OCNP participants) stakeholders to develop a strategic plan for identifying community needs and potential RO partners.
   - Identify target population (e.g., low-income/minority populations, rural communities, persons with low English proficiency).
   - Evaluate local data to determine factors such as demographic profile, geographic location, nutrition needs, and aging services usage of target population.

2. Conduct a needs assessment:
   - Identify available restaurants in the area that can meet the needs of the clients to be served. Consider meals that meet the food customs and expectations of clients.
   - In addition to restaurants, identify other foodservice establishments such as grocery stores with food service operations and food trucks which can provide flexibility with dining as potential partners.
   - Review menus of local restaurants for offerings and pricing and contact to discuss RO opportunity. Identify range of reasonable meal costs.
   - Develop a list of potential restaurants and foodservice establishments from the needs assessment to provide notice of the RO opportunity.

3. Identify potential RO partners:
   - Issue an Invitation for Bid, Request for Proposal, or other public information outlining the partnership opportunity, an overview of the program, programmatic requirements, goals, and scope of service.
   - Identify partners that can meet the needs of the target population to serve meals within the desired price point or are willing to negotiate.

4. Review bid/proposal, select, and contract with RO partner:
   - Collaborate with identified partner and negotiate a mutually beneficial contract.
   - Review and finalize all scope of work specifications in the contract.

5. Develop implementation procedures and launch partnership:
   - Schedule bi-weekly or monthly meetings with RO partner to ensure continued communication.
   - Establish an implementation timeline and data management systems.

Procurement and Contract Requirements

CCR procurement and contracting requirements apply to AAAs and nutrition providers seeking meal vendor services with restaurants. AAAs and nutrition providers should follow the procurement requirements that align with the size of the contract to determine if a competitive process is required. A Pre-Award Review requiring AAAs to submit documentation to CDA prior to the AAA awarding a contract to a for-profit entity also applies. AAAs will make the approval determination for nutrition providers wishing to contract with a for-profit entity. For RO procurement and contract requirements, please see MN-2324, Exhibit A, Article II, 4.

Menus

Restaurant Menu Options

The AAA or nutrition provider's RD should work with restaurants to adapt menus to meet nutrition requirements while incorporating the preferences of clients. Menu options include:

- Offer a single menu option per day either from the existing restaurant menu or a menu developed for the RO.
- Offer multiple menu options from existing restaurant menu or a menu developed for the RO for maximum choice and flexibility for participants.

Nutritional Requirements of Meals

The general requirements of the Title IIIC program apply when contracting meal services with an RO partner. AAAs and nutrition providers should review OCNP requirements with their RO partners and collaborate to develop and/or modify existing practices that will support meeting nutrition requirements.

Menu planning under the RO must follow the OCNP Menu guidance to ensure compliance with the DGAs and provide 1/3 of the DRIs. When planning meals under this dining option, try to utilize the restaurant menu instead of creating new meals, if possible. Offering multiple meal options on the restaurant menu gives clients a choice in selecting breakfast, lunch, and dinner options and can be available any time of day based on the operating hours of the restaurant. Menus can include hot and cold meals including salads, sandwiches, and wraps.

Nutritional Analysis

Following OCNP Menu Guidance, complete a nutritional analysis of the meals offered using either a computerized nutrient analysis or a meal component pattern with approval by the AAA RD or nutrition provider's RD.

For menu planning resources, see *Appendix A: Meal Planning Guide for Older Californians Nutrition Program Restaurant Option* for meal guidelines and recommendations for planning well-balanced meals to meet the nutritional needs of older adults.

Restaurant Operations

Food Safety and Sanitation

Restaurants providing meals under the RO are required to maintain valid health permits through their local County Health Department and meet all requirements under the CRFC. Quarterly and annual monitoring of food safety and sanitation by AAAs and/or nutrition providers is required for all RO partners.

Restaurant Staff Training

AAAs and nutrition providers need to ensure restaurant staff training for RO partners meet CCR requirements for the OCNP. The AAA or nutrition provider RD will work with the RO partner to develop and/or review and approve the annual training plan to ensure the following:

- At a minimum, trainings will include:
  (1) Food safety, prevention of foodborne illness, and HACCP principles*.
  (2) Accident prevention, instruction on fire safety, first aid, choking, earthquake preparedness, and other emergency procedures.
- A minimum of four (4) hours of training is provided annually and may be conducted by the RO partner or the AAA/nutrition provider.
- Training sessions are evaluated by attendees.
- Access to documentation of training and evaluations.

*Restaurant employees with a food handler card meet the required topics in (1). The AAA or nutrition provider RD is still responsible for ensuring topics in (2) and the other training requirements listed above are met.

Meal Leftovers

Clients can leave the restaurant and take meal leftovers whenever they choose, and it is standard practice for a restaurant to either package leftovers or provide to-go containers upon request. AAAs and nutrition providers should develop or adapt their current leftovers policy to incorporate this option for RO meals.

OCNP Program Aspects

<u>Client Registration Intake Process and Issuance of Meal Vouchers</u>

Enrolling clients in the RO option is a programmatic function that is carried out by the AAA or nutrition provider. This includes determining eligibility, providing an orientation to the OCNP program, issuing meal vouchers for the meals allotted to each client per month, and making referrals to other supportive services. AAAs and nutrition providers will determine the following:

- Client eligibility.
- Meal voucher system: paper vouchers or technology such as an electronic card reading system or mobile app.
- Number of meals that clients are allotted each month.
- Redemption of vouchers and how meals are tracked.

AAAs and nutrition providers may conduct the initial intake with clients, as well as the annual nutrition risk assessment, either in person with clients at the RO partner location or over the phone.

<u>Voluntary Contributions vs Tipping Restaurant Wait Staff</u>

Each eligible client must be given an opportunity to voluntarily contribute to the cost of the service per OAA and CCR requirements. Voluntary contributions can either be made onsite if program staff or volunteers are present or by mailing a monthly/quarterly voluntary contribution letter to clients if program staff or volunteers are not present during mealtime. Offering an online opportunity for making voluntary contributions is also an option. Options for making voluntary contributions should be communicated to clients during enrollment.

AAAs, nutrition providers, and RO partners should explain the difference between voluntary contributions and tipping restaurant wait staff:

- Suggested voluntary contributions are voluntary and money contributed goes back to the nutrition program to expand services.
- Monetary tips for restaurant wait staff are separate from contributions and are optional for participants. Tips for the wait staff go to the restaurant employees.

When establishing the meal reimbursement rate with RO partners, AAAs and nutrition providers may wish to consider including a set amount for monetary tips and communicating to clients that restaurant wait staff do not expect tips as they have been included in the cost of the meal.

<u>Guest Fees</u>

Guest fees for individuals not eligible for the nutrition program should cover the full cost of the meal. AAAs and nutrition providers should work with RO partners to determine the appropriate guest fee amount and the process for collecting guest fees.

Client Grievance Process

Clients receiving meals under the RO must be informed of the AAA's or nutrition provider's Grievance Process to make a complaint regarding the program, staff, service, or other concern. This information can be provided during client orientation.

Nutrition Education

Provide nutrition education approved by the AAA RD or provider RD through either of the following methods at least four times per year:

- Onsite presentation or small group discussions by AAA or nutrition provider.
- Virtual nutrition education presentations.
   - Printed education materials can be provided online, onsite at restaurants, or mailed to clients to supplement virtual nutrition education sessions.

Soliciting Client Feedback

Obtain client feedback through surveys, comment cards, or phone interviews on topics including:

- Satisfaction with meals, customer service.
- Annual nutrition education needs assessment.

Onsite Data Collection and Reporting

Under the RO, OCNP clients may consume meals onsite as a dine-in service or as To-Go meals that are picked up at the restaurant and consumed elsewhere. If AAA or nutrition provider staff are not onsite during mealtime, the RO partner should be instructed to record meals according to dine-in or to-go service (or other common terms). Since C-1 and C-2 are not common restaurant industry terms, the following is an example of instructions for restaurant staff to record meals:

- Dine-in meal: the meal was served for onsite dining (i.e., C-1 meal).
- To-Go meal: meal was served to-go for offsite dining (i.e., C-2 meal).

For reporting requirements, see MN-2324, Exhibit A, Article III, E.

Client Orientation to the Restaurant Option

A client welcome packet can be an effective way to communicate to clients how the RO program works. Suggested content for a welcome packet includes:

- Client welcome letter that includes the following:
    - Overview of the restaurant program (location, days/hours of operation for program meals, eligibility, etc.)
    - How voucher system works (if applicable)
    - Number of meals allotted each month and how to redeem
    - Suggested voluntary contribution
- Suggested voluntary contribution letter that includes information for guest meals and tipping restaurant wait staff
- Grievance process
- Providing feedback
- Nutrition Education schedule

See Appendices for sample documents:

- Appendix B – Sample Client Welcome Letter
- Appendix C – Sample Voluntary Contribution Letter
- Appendix D – Sample Client Satisfaction Survey

Restaurant Option Resources

To assist AAAs and nutrition providers with implementing the RO, the following resources may be helpful:

- [No Reservations Required: Establishing Senior Nutrition Program & Restaurant Partnerships in the Age of COVID-19](#)
  Commissioned by: National Resource Center on Nutrition and Aging,
  Lisa LaBonte, Consultant
- SeniorDine: Tablet technology used to streamline the meal tracking and check-in process; program has the ability to scan clients in directly upon arrival and track whether meals were consumed as C-I Dine In or C-2 To-Go.
    - https://accessiblesolutions.com/seniordine