

Congregate Meal Program Guidelines



Congregate Meal Service Definition

Congregate meal programs offer seniors the opportunity to enjoy well-balanced, affordable meals in a social setting. Seniors are encouraged to participate in planning, cooking meals, setting tables and helping with clean up. Hot nutritious meals are offered to seniors three to five days per week in a group setting, such as an apartment block or senior centre. Meals are very reasonably priced (\$3.50 to \$7.50).

Congregate Meal Program Goals

- To provide well-balanced and affordable meals in a social and group context by providing a minimum of 15 to 20 meals per day.
- To provide and encourage volunteer and leadership opportunities in contributing to the operation of meal program.

Congregate Meal Program Objectives

- to provide an opportunity for older individuals to live their years in dignity by providing healthy, appealing meals
- promoting health and preventing disease
- reducing malnutrition risk and improving nutritional status
- reducing social isolation and increasing social interaction
- linking older adults to community based services
- providing an opportunity for meaningful community involvement, such as through volunteering

Eligibility Criteria

- a) Participants must be 55 years of age or older.
- b) At the discretion of the service provider, individuals who have not attained 55 years of age may receive such services.
- c) At the service provider's discretion, non-senior individuals providing volunteer services during meal hours may receive such services.
- d) An eligible participant may only bring a guest if the program has been notified in the usual prescribed process.

Determining a Client Base

Local organizations that may provide potential client information include:

- Winnipeg Regional Health Authority Community Offices and Access Centres
- Public Health
- Home Care
- Mental Health
- Long Term Care and Services to Seniors
- Rehab/Geriatrics – GPAT, Psycho-geriatric Teams
- Community Resource Council Offices
- Tenant Resource Programs
- Senior Centres

Needs and Resources Assessment

Question to Ask When Planning a Congregate Meal Program

- Financial Resources:** What are the potential funding sources?
What are the specific application procedures? What is the appropriate user fee?
- Human Resources:** What number of personnel (paid staff and volunteers) will be needed?
What skills will be required?
Where can volunteers be recruited?
What is the projected cost if volunteers are not used or not available?
- Congregate Meal Program site:**
What facilities will be required?
Where are they available?
When are they available?
What is the rental charge?
- Food Suppliers:** Are suitable meal suppliers available?
Are food suppliers reputable and approved?
What are the approximate service costs?
- Meal-related Issues:** How frequently should service be provided?
When should meals be served?
What type of meals should be served?
What style of meal service is appropriate?
- Transportation:** What will be needed?
What transportation arrangements are available? What is the cost?
- Educational/Recreational Activities:**
What are the potential interests/needs of the clients?
What health concerns should be taken into consideration when planning meals/activities?
What facilities and equipment will be required? What is the cost?

Representatives from the target client group should be consulted at this time (for example, through a congregate meal program survey) to determine their opinions on the most suitable dining sites, the frequency of service, meal times, meal charges, transportation arrangements, and appropriate educational, recreational and health-related activities.

Financial Resources

Sources of funding must be available to finance administrative, capital, and operational costs of the Congregate Meal Programs. They may include:

- User fees
- Winnipeg Regional Health Authority
- City of Winnipeg (e.g. Per Capita Grant)
- Manitoba Community Services Council
- Service clubs (e.g. Rotary Club of Winnipeg)
- United Way of Winnipeg
- Foundations (e.g. Winnipeg Foundation, Thomas Sill Foundation)
- Manitoba Culture, Heritage and Tourism Community Places Program
- Charitable donations

Human Resources

The availability of competent staff and volunteers is critical when considering a Congregate Meal Program. The personnel needs of a Congregate Meal Program are:

- **Congregate Meal Coordinator** – provides nutritious meals and social support to seniors and persons with disabilities in a congregate dining setting. Responsibilities include:
 - Planning daily menu
 - Recruiting, training and scheduling volunteers
 - Encouraging meal participants and community volunteers to assist with the meal program
 - Keeping attendance records of participants and volunteers
 - Recording statistics for submission to Board and Regional Health Authority
 - Organizing educational and recreational activities
 - Purchasing equipment and supplies
 - Promoting the service
- **Volunteer** duties may include:
 - Helping to shop for groceries, prepare meals, serve meals and clean-up
 - Greeting clients, assisting with removal and putting on of coats
 - Setting up (tables, chairs, dishes, etc.)
 - Helping clients carry food trays
 - Encouraging social interaction among clients at the dining table
 - Delivering meals to suites
 - Collecting cash

When considering personnel needs, the following questions should be answered:

- Is there a potential source of personnel (paid staff/volunteers) in the community?
- What are the desired skills and qualifications of the personnel?
- What is the required total number of personnel (i.e. staff and volunteers) for the service?
- What is the required number of paid staff and volunteers?
- What is the appropriate number of drivers?

It is typical to have at least one paid staff member to act as Congregate Meal Coordinator. This employee may be full or part-time depending on the number of days the meal program operates.

Congregate Meal Dining

The Congregate Meal Program site should be:

- In a familiar, safe area of the community
- Within a reasonable distance from the majority of the clients' residences, even if transportation is available
- Close to parking
- Accessible by public transit
- Free of architectural barriers that which limit the participation of older adults (ie. include wide doorways, ramps, elevators, etc.)

Potential sites for Congregate Meal Programs may include:

- Senior centers
- Seniors' housing buildings
- Community centers
- Churches

Multiple sites may be used to allow a more frequent service and accommodate a larger client base.

Facility Written Agreements

Each program, not operating in an owned facility, must have a written agreement with the owner of the facility used a meal site. The agreement must address at a minimum:

- a) Responsibility for care and maintenance of facility, specifically including restrooms, kitchen, and areas of common use;
- b) Responsibility for snow removal
- c) Agreement on utility costs
- d) Responsibility for insurance coverage
- e) Security procedures
- f) Agreement on maintenance, repairs and replacement of appliances and replacement/breakage of dishes
- g) Responsibility for appropriate licensing by the Health Department
- h) Responsibility for safety inspections

Dinning Space and Environment

The following architectural and environmental design features should be considered when deciding on a dining site:

- **Space**
 - Ample space should be available in the facility to meet recreational as well as dining needs.
 - The entrance to the facility should enable clients to get in and out of vehicles easily.
 - Non-slip tiles should be used on floors when tiles are utilized.
 - Ramps for wheelchairs and walkers should be in place.

- **Washrooms**
 - Adequate number of toilets for male and female patrons
 - Must be wheelchair accessible.
 - Must have hand washing signs posted in toilet rooms used by staff.
 - Must have adequate ventilation.

- **Furniture layout**
 - Dining tables should be well spaced to allow ease of movement, and arranged to encourage socialization among participants.
 - Arms of wheelchairs should fit under the table tops.
 - Chairs should have arms to provide support for frail individuals, and side posts or raised top corners to provide a place for canes.

- **Lighting**
 - Direct light in the clients' eyes, either artificial light or sunlight, must be avoided.
 - For visually impaired clients, provide colour contrast between the dishes and table surface.
 - Table coverings of soft colours and non-glare materials are most appropriate.

Food Supplies

- Food must be obtained in sound condition, free from spoilage, adulteration, poisonous or harmful substance, filth or other contamination, and must be safe for human consumption (City of Winnipeg, Food Service Establishment By-Law, 2008)
- Food shall be obtained from sources that have been approved by the appropriate authority – see By-Law for further details and instruction.

Meal Sponsor

Ideally the Congregate Meal Coordinator should be preparing meals at the dining site, although an acceptable alternative is having meals prepared off-site and delivered hot to the dining location (provided the meals are prepared in a place approved by the Public Health Inspector).

Transportation

Possible modes of transportation for bringing participants to and from the Congregate Meal Program include:

- Volunteers with their own cars
- Agency vehicles with volunteer drivers
- Special transportation for the mobility impaired
- Clients' family members/friends with cars
- Taxi service

Educational, Recreational and Health-Related Activities

When considered acceptable by clients and feasible by service providers, educational programs and recreational activities in addition to the meal should be offered.

An educational program should build on the learning styles of the participants and recognize their experiences, interests and individual health needs. Examples of activities include nutrition education on healthy active living, diabetes, and blood pressure. (See Nutrition Education section)

Projected Service Costs

1. Personnel Costs
 - a. Will vary according to size of program
 - b. Salary and benefits of paid personnel should be in accordance with qualifications and experience
2. Congregate Meal Expenses. These may include:
 - a. Rental and utility charges
 - b. On-going operational costs including:
 - i. Liability insurance at the dining facility
 - ii. Workers compensation
 - iii. Meal-related supplies (e.g. serviettes, drinking straws, stirrers, place mats, table decorations, name tags)
 - c. Capital costs for setting up food preparation and/or dining area, which include:
 - i. Furniture
 - ii. Appliances and equipment for food preparation (e.g. stove, refrigerator)
 - iii. Supplies and food service (e.g. cutlery, dishes, etc.)
3. Meal-Related Charges
 - a. Food costs
 - i. On a fixed fee basis
 - ii. The client is expected to pay for the meals and cover any charges incurred
 - iii. Cost of meals for volunteers must be considered
 - b. Cost for packaging materials, containers and cutlery

- i. Possible off-site meal delivery costs must be considered
4. Transportation-Related Costs. If applicable to the program, costs may include:
 - a. Vehicle expenses
 - b. Drivers' expenses
 - c. Paid taxi service and special transportation vehicles
5. Expenses for Educational, Recreational and Health-Related Activities
 - a. The agency should strive for donated time and expertise from volunteers
 - b. Supplies and equipment may include a piano and audio-visual equipment
6. Service Promotion Expenses
 - a. Promotional charges may be avoided through use of free advertising, public service announcements, volunteer distribution of service information and corporate sponsoring messages.
7. In-service training costs should be considered (e.g. Food Handler Certificate)
 - Every effort should be made to negotiate the lowest overall service costs without sacrificing service quality
 - Agencies approved for funding are required to balance their budgets by collecting user fees and through fundraising efforts
 - Donations must remain confidential. Each service provider shall protect the privacy of each person with respect to his/her donations. Procedures shall be put in place to accurately account for all donations.

Implementing Congregate Meal Programs

The following information was adapted from the City of Winnipeg Food Service Establishment By-Law No. 5160/89 (Dec. 2008)

Certificates and Licenses

- All Congregate Meal Programs must have a valid permit from the Public Health Inspector; the permit must be renewed annually and be posted in a prominent location.
- No person shall operate the Congregate Meal Program unless the person in charge has successfully completed the Certified Food Handler Training Program.
- The on-duty person in charge must post their Food Handler Training Program Certificate in a prominent place at the Congregate Meal Program.
- The Congregate Meal Program must be able to document:
 - Compliance with fire safety standards
 - Certification as an accessible facility

Food Protection

- Potentially hazardous foods must be kept hot or cold as appropriate. These types of foods include:

Meat	Meat sauces
Poultry	Custards
Milk	Meat and potato salads
Eggs	Cut melons (e.g. watermelon)
Fish	Tofu
Creamed filled baked goods	Cooked beans
Gravies	Baked and mashed potatoes
Soups	Cooked vegetables
Rice	Garlic and oil mixtures
- No food shall be served at any Congregate Meal Program unless it is prepared on the premises or another place that has been approved by the Public Health Inspector

Food Storage

- Food removed from its original packages must be stored in clean, covered containers.
- Containers should be non-absorbent and incapable of being penetrated.
- Containers of food should be stored at a minimum of 16 centimetres (6 inches) off the floor.
- Packaged food must not be stored in contact with water or undrained ice.
- Bulk food (if not stored in its original package) should be stored in a container identifying the food.

Refrigerated Storage

- City of Wpg By-Law requires that food requiring refrigeration (i.e. potentially hazardous food) must be rapidly cooled within 4 hours and kept at an internal temperature of 5°C (41°F) or below.
- As per the WRHA and the CFIA (Canadian Food Inspection Agency), for best quality and food safety, keep fridge temperatures below 4°C.
- Frozen food must be kept frozen and stored at -18°C (0°F) or below.
- If ice is used for cooling food, it should not be used for human consumption.
- All refrigeration equipment must have an easily readable thermometer, accurate to 1 degree Celsius (2 degrees Fahrenheit).

Hot Storage

- Potentially hazardous food requiring hot storage must be kept at an internal temperature of 60°C (140°F).
- Hot food storage equipment must come with a numerically scaled indicating thermometer. Otherwise, a metal stem bayonet-type thermometer accurate to 1 degree Celsius (2 degrees Fahrenheit) must be used.

Food Preparation

- Food must be prepared on surfaces that have been properly cleaned, rinsed and sanitized.
- All raw fruits and vegetables must be properly washed in clean water prior to eating and cooking.
- All potentially hazardous food requiring cooking must be cooked to at least 60°C (140°F). Exceptions include:
 - Poultry stuffing, stuffed meats and stuffing containing meat or poultry – these must be cooked to at least 74°C (165°F).
 - Rare to medium-rare beef must be cooked to a minimum internal temperature of 55°C (131°F).
 - Ground meat shall be cooked to a minimum internal temperature of 70°C (160°F).
- Once food has been cooked and refrigerated, it must be rapidly reheated to at least 74°C (165°F).
- Frozen foods must be thawed:
 - In a refrigerator kept below 5°C (41°F).
 - Under cold, running water
 - As part of the cooking process
 - In a microwave

Food Service

- Foods shall be kept at an internal temperature below 5°C (41°F) or above 60°C (140°F) during service.
- Milk and milk products must be served from their original containers; cream and milk used as a beverage additive may be served in a protected pour-type container not exceeding 250 ml in capacity.
- Every table or counter used for eating must be provided with a clean tablecloth or place mats or individual napkins, or sanitized trays.

Food Transportation

- All foods being transported from the Congregate Meal Program must be effectively protected from contamination.
- Potentially hazardous food requiring refrigeration or hot storage must be kept below 5°C (41°F) or above 60°C (140°F) during transport.
- All frozen food must be kept below -15°C (5°F) during transport.

Materials , Equipment and Utensils

- All equipment and utensils must be:
 - Made of safe materials
 - Corrosion resistant and non-absorbent
 - Smooth
 - Easily-cleanable
 - Durable
- Only hard maple or equivalent non-absorbent material shall be used for:
 - Cutting blocks & cutting boards
 - Salad bowls
- Paper and styrofoam cups and plates cause easy spillage and are not environmentally sound.
- Glasses should be tapered at the base for easier grasp.
- Light coloured cups and mugs should be used for dark liquids such as tea and coffee, making it easier to observe amounts.

Cleaning, Sanitation and Storage of Equipment and Utensils

- Tableware, equipment and utensils must be washed, rinsed and sanitized after each use.
- Food contact surfaces (e.g. stoves, grills, etc.) must be cleaned as often as necessary, but always at the end of each day's operation
- Preparation tables and cutting boards must be cleaned and sanitized after each use.
- A three compartment sink must be located in the kitchen area; the first sink will hold clean, hot detergent solution; the second sink will hold clean, warm water; and the third sink will be a sanitizing solution.
- Sanitizing solutions can be prepared in the following ways:
 - 50 parts per million of chlorine in water at least 24°C (75°F) for a minimum of 1 minute
 - 12.5 parts per million of iodine in water at least 24°C (75°F) for a minimum of 1 minute
 - hot water no less than 77°C (170°F) for a minimum of 30 seconds
- Treatment with any sanitizing solution acceptable by the Public Health Inspector is also permitted.
- All equipment and utensils must air dried after sanitation
- Cleaned and sanitized utensils should be touched only by their handles
- Cups, glasses, bowls, plates and similar items must be handled without contact to inside surfaces or surfaces that contact the user's mouth.

Wiping Cloths

- Cloths used for cleaning equipment, utensils and shelves must be:
 - Moist
 - Clean
 - Rinsed frequently
 - Sanitized and stored in a sanitizing solution
 - Used for no other purpose

Staff Health and Cleanliness and Practices

- Staff **must wash their hands and exposed arms** thoroughly with soap and warm water before starting work, during work as necessary and after smoking, drinking, or using the washroom.
- Staff clothing must be clean.
- All staff preparing food, dispensing food, or washing utensils must wear a clean, full length apron, smock, or uniform that is worn for no other purpose.
- Head covering or hair restraints must be worn so as to prevent direct or indirect contact of hair with food, equipment or utensils.
- Beards unless neat and trimmed are not permitted.

Confidentiality

Under the Personal Health Information Act of Manitoba (PHIA), a **trustee** or “health professional, health care facility, public body, or health services agency that collects or maintains personal health information” shall:

- Hold personal health information in confidence and use it solely for the reasons it was provided.
- Get the consent of the individual before using their information for other reasons or sharing it with people outside their organization. There are exceptions to this, however. These are a few examples:
 - A health care provider may share information with another provider who is involved in the individual’s care, as long as the information is relevant and as long as the individual hasn’t asked the first provider not to.
 - A trustee might share personal health information with an outside agency if it is necessary to prevent serious harm to the individual or someone else.

For additional information on PHIA, please see reference section for website information.

Daily Operations

Sign up

- Congregate Meal Programs should maintain a daily sign-in sheet for meal participants (this includes meals that are delivered). This will enable the program to properly document the number of meals served each day.
- Volunteer sign-up sheets should also be used; this will enable accurate accounting of volunteer hours.

Meals to be served

- Each meal site must serve meals at least three days per week with a minimum average of 15 eligible participants per serving.

Holidays

- No meals will be served on holidays determined by the individual programs. Participants are strongly encouraged to order takeout meals if possible.

No Smoking

The meal program should have a no smoking policy.

Payment

- Cost of the meal will vary depending on the particular meal program.
- Participants will be notified in advance of any changes in the cost of the meals.

Input by participants

- There should be a suggestion box set up in the dining room to encourage participants to share their comments and suggestions regarding the meal program.
- The Congregate Meal Coordinator should arrange to meet with participants quarterly for the purpose of gathering feedback and sharing feedback.

Purchase of supplies

- Purchases will be made, as often as possible, from suppliers in the immediate community.
- An inventory of supplies and food stuff will be kept for monthly review by the Coordinator.

Leftovers

- If there are sufficient leftovers, “take-home heat and serve meals” could be made available to participants at the same price as the regular meal. Ensure that these meals are properly covered in containers and frozen if not sold immediately. Ensure the participant purchasing the meal is aware of how to properly heat the meal.
- If there are not enough leftovers to make dinners, then they can be sold to meal program participants and volunteers.
- All transported food which becomes “leftover” except unopened, prepackaged food, must be properly disposed of at the Congregate Meal Program site.

Menu Planning

- Menus must be posted.
- Menus will be planned in accordance with Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating, keeping in mind the particular nutritional needs of seniors.
- Menus will include sufficient variety and be served on a regular, rotating schedule.
- Fresh fruit and vegetables will be used as often as possible
- Meal Coordinators will attempt to accommodate diet restrictions and/or allergies when possible.

Health and Safety

The meal program will be operated according to the standards of the Public Health department and in keeping with fire and safety regulations. This includes:

- Hair nets are to be worn at all times for food preparation and serving.
- No finger nail polish or jewelry is to be worn by individuals involved in the preparation or service of food.
- Major appliances are to be cleaned regularly.
- Storage cupboards are to be cleaned monthly.
- The freezer is to be cleaned quarterly.
- Warmers are to be emptied daily.
- A fire extinguisher is to be available at all times.
- Exits are to be clearly marked and fire procedures posted.
- A telephone must be available for use during an emergency situation.
- Emergency first aid kits must be available and accessible.
- Eye wash stations should be available in meal preparation area.
- Heimlich maneuver instructions should be posted in the dining area

Financial Records

- The Meal Coordinator will receive/have a cash float at the beginning of each month; the amount will be determined by the Congregate Meal Coordinator (e.g. \$200/month).
- The volunteer cashier will have sufficient cash from the float for making change each day.
- At the end of each meal, the volunteer cashier and the meal coordinator will count the cash together and record the income. They are to prepare the change for the next day and set aside the profit from the current day.
- The Meal Coordinator will bank the profits at the end of the week.
- The Meal Coordinator will present a monthly statement, with receipts, to the Community Resource Coordinator on the last working day of the month. The float will then be reimbursed accordingly for the beginning of the new month.
- The Meal Coordinator will keep track of the costs per meal so that this can be reviewed quarterly.

Liability Insurance

Each congregate meal plan must carry liability insurance sufficient to cover its operation

Statistics

The Meal Coordinator will maintain the following statistics for the month (See Congregate Meal Program *Monthly Report* form):

- Number of meals served (including take-outs)
- Cost per meal
- Number of volunteers
- Number of volunteer hours

Cashing Handling Procedures

At minimum, each program will engage in:

- Daily counting and recording of all receipts by two individuals.
- Provisions for sealing, written acknowledgement and transporting of daily receipts to either deposit in a financial institution or secure storage until a deposit can be arranged.
- Reconciliation of deposit receipts and daily collection records by someone other than the depositor.

Volunteer Recognition

- Will be based on volunteer sign-in sheets.
- The Congregate Meal Coordinator (or meal committee if existent) shall be responsible for volunteer recognition. For example, for every 3 hours logged as volunteer work, the volunteer may receive a free meal.

Nutrition Education

Suggested Nutrition Education Goals

1. To create positive attitudes toward good nutrition and provide motivation for improved dietary practices
2. To provide adequate knowledge and skills necessary for critical thinking regarding diet and health so the individual can make appropriate food choices from an increasingly complex food supply
3. To assist the individual in identifying resources for continuing access to sound food and nutrition information
4. To provide information in a socially and culturally appropriate manner.

Suggested Nutrition Education Content

Provides information and guidance concerning:

- a) Food, including the types and amounts of food required to meet one's nutritional needs (Canada's Food Guide)
- b) Behavioural factors, including eating and food preparation habits
- c) Consumer issues, including food purchasing power to maximize food value

(Source: Congregate and Home-Delivered Nutrition Program Standards under the Older Americans Act and OPI, 2009, p. 11-12)

Nutrition Education Resources

Methods for nutrition education can include speakers, newsletters, printed materials, bulletin boards, displays, videos, etc. Some examples of nutrition oriented agencies:

Dietitians of Canada: <http://www.dietitians.ca>

The American Dietetic Association: <http://www.eatright.org/>

Canadian Diabetes Association: <http://www.diabetes.ca>

Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada: <http://www.heartandstroke.ca>

General nutrition & wellness info for seniors: <http://www.aarp.org/healthguide>

Chronic disease information: <http://www.cdc.gov/health/diseases.htm>

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