

Menu Planning and Innovation in Aged Care

Position

All residential aged care consumers must receive the opportunity to meet their nutrition needs and food preferences from the daily menu. Menu audits conducted by Accredited Practising Dietitians (APDs) will include a review of nutrition care, quality of meals and the dining experience, and integrity of the food delivery system and must be completed at least on an annual basis.

Dietitians Australia is calling on the Government for urgent investment to develop evidence-based National Meal Guidelines, including governance and accountability frameworks, for residential aged care providers.

The development of governance, monitoring and evaluation frameworks for the existing National Meal Guidelines for home delivered and centre-based meal programs for older Australians is also required.

Recommendations

1. NHMRC to develop separate dietary guidelines for older adults (70+) as part of the current Australian Dietary Guidelines review, to inform food systems and menu planning in aged care.
2. Australian Government to urgently fund:
 - a. The development of evidence-based National Meal Guidelines, including governance and accountability frameworks, for residential aged care providers; and
 - b. The establishment of governance, monitoring and evaluation frameworks for the existing National Meal Guidelines for home delivered and centre-based meal programs for older Australians.

Key considerations for the National Meal Guidelines

- Evidence-based Australian Dietary Guidelines for Older Australians must be developed and used as the basis for National Meal Guidelines.
- Guidelines are to be based on nutrition and dietary needs of adults 70+ years across the continuum of aged care.
- Guidelines are to include a best practice guide for menu design and presentation, including the design of texture modified menus and the presentation of menus using a careful choice of language and appropriate pictures, considering those from non-English reading backgrounds.
- Aged Care Providers (both residential and community aged care) must establish a multidisciplinary team to plan, implement and monitor food and nutrition services, with input from an APD, food service staff, nursing staff, care workers, family/carers and volunteers.

- All menu items must have a standard recipe and serve sizes documented. Nutrient analysis, and identification of allergens is highly recommended.
- To improve consumer experience and the likelihood that they will consume their meal, consumers should make their meal choice at the point of service, or as close as possible. Innovative methods, such as buffets, carts and room service which provides point of service choice is strongly recommended.
- Currently, most menus are cyclical and most often 4 weeks. With the introduction of innovative meal delivery systems, the menu should be flexible and always provide real choice for all consumers including those on modified texture diets.
- The menu must be in a form that all consumers (or families) are able to comprehend. This includes photos of meals, written menus on tables and menu boards in the dining room. Staff offering meals and providing meals must know what the meal is and understand principles of aged care nutrition to be able to offer suitable alternatives to the resident.

Background

There are a number of contributing factors that lead to malnutrition in older people. Individual factors include social isolation, poor dentition, multiple medications, difficulty swallowing and an overall poor appetite. The organisation may provide a menu with limited nutritious options, offer foods that are unfamiliar or have poor delivery systems.¹ There may be a staff culture that views weight loss a normal part of ageing, which it is not.

In many aged care organisations, the menu is not designed by APDs and will often be deficient in protein and other key nutrients across the day. As the menu is the sole source of nutrition in an aged care home, it must provide adequate nutrition for all residents across the whole day, including meals, mid-meals and fluids.²