

## **Guidance on providing additional take home meals, emergency meals, and breakfast staple meals in the congregate nutrition program**

DARS-VDA has reviewed the practice of providing additional take home meals, emergency meals, and breakfast staple meals. The Congregate Nutrition Service Standards, Program Requirements, p. 2 of 18, say, "Each nutrition services provider must provide at least one hot or other appropriate meal in a congregate setting each day the site is in operation. Additional meals meeting the requirements specified under "definitions" may be provided to each participant for days the site is not open."

The interpretation of the additional meals described in the second sentence is that meals may be sent home with clients to be eaten at home when the nutrition site is not open, up to 5 days a week. For example, at a site open Monday and Wednesday, on Monday seniors would be provided a meal to be eaten onsite and a frozen meal to be taken home for Tuesday. On Wednesday, participants would be served a meal to be eaten onsite and 2 meals to take home for Thursday and Friday. Likewise, some congregate meal participants have been allowed to take home breakfast staples and emergency meals.

DARS-VDA has reviewed the practice of providing additional take home, emergency meals, and breakfast staple meals. With the reductions in funding available for nutrition programs, additional risk of ensuring accountability in providing the meals, and ensuring clients are consuming the meals appropriately, DARS-VDA has issued these guidelines for AAAs to strengthen internal policies and parameters in which these meals are offered.

Agencies currently providing additional meals are encouraged to review and consider discontinuing additional meals and breakfast staple meals that are taken home by congregate clients. In addition, parameters need to be established on the provision of emergency meals.

As an alternative, AAAs may consider partnering with local agencies such as food banks, food pantries, and other food assistance organizations which may provide food for senior participants' use at home. The food would not be counted as eligible service units, but nonetheless may significantly help senior participants. AAA's may also consider facilitating SNAP or other food assistance enrollment for eligible congregate nutrition clients.

If an AAA wishes to continue to provide additional take home meals to congregate nutrition participants, the agency shall develop an Additional Congregate Meal Policy that shall be approved by the agency's governing board. The Additional Congregate Meal Policy must include the following measures to ensure the integrity of the program:

1. The additional meals shall be provided at each visit for the client to carry home herself or himself. The meals shall not be delivered in bulk for the week or month. Clients not attending the site will not receive meals. The policy must

state the maximum number of meals each client should receive based on the days the congregate meal site is open. The policy should also take into account when the site is closed, such as for holidays, other functions, or repairs.

2. The policy shall state clients taking meals home must provide a signature indicating the number of meals received. Operationally, the client may indicate next to his or her signature on the sign-in sheet, the number of meals taken home. The signature form shall be included with the site's monthly reporting process for documentation of meals provided for entry into the DARS-VDA approved client database.
3. All meals counted as eligible meal units shall meet nutrient content guidance as outlined in the DARS-VDA menu planning guidelines.

With regard to breakfast staples and emergency meals, the following recommendations should be taken into consideration:

1. Breakfast staple meals taken home by congregate clients should be discontinued.
2. Emergency meals for congregate clients should not exceed more than 5 meals per allotment.