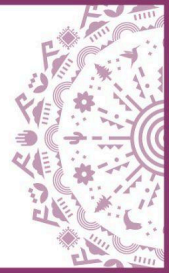




Division of Aging & Adult Services State Unit on Aging Policy



Subject: Congregate Meals Program
Policy Chapter: 3500
Effective Date: 07/01/2025
Revision Number: 0

Nutrition Services: Congregate Meals Program

I. POLICY STATEMENT

This policy provides an outline of the Division of Aging and Adult Services (DAAS) operational policies, procedures, and reporting requirements specifically for the Congregate Meals program (CNG), a nutrition service.

This policy section is subject to change as additional information and/or regulations are received from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

II. APPLICABILITY

- A. Department of Economic Security (DES)/DAAS Employees of the Nutrition Services Congregate Meals program;
- B. Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs); and
- C. AAA subcontractors that provide Nutrition Services.

III. AUTHORITY

[Older Americans Act \(2020\)](#)

Pub L. 116-131

United States Code (U.S.C.)	42 U.S.C. Chapter 35 Subchapter III, Part C.
Code of Federal Regulations (C.F.R.)	45 CFR part §1321 and §1322.
Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA)	CFDA 93.045 - Nutrition Services and 93.053 - Nutrition Services Incentive Program.
A.R.S. § 11-269.12	Food handler training and certificate.
A.R.S. § 11-269.28	Food handler certificate; school activities; volunteers; exemption.
A.R.S § 41-1959	Confidential information; permissible disclosure; rules; violation; classification.
A.R.S. § 46-141	Criminal record information checks; fingerprinting employees and applicants; definition.
A.R.S. § 46-459	Adult protective services registry.
A.A.C. R-9-8-101 et seq	Department of Health Services - Food, Recreational, and Institutional Sanitation.
ADES Nutrition, Food Service and Wellness Manual	Published 2023 by Arizona Department of Economic Security Division of Aging and Adult Services.

IV. DEFINITIONS

Client: An individual who is seeking or receiving Congregate Meals.

Congregate: A group setting where Meals are served, allowing older adults the opportunity to socialize.

Cost Sharing: A portion of the cost for services rendered is provided by the Client.

Economic Need: Need resulting from an income level at or below the Federal Poverty Level and as further defined by state and area plans based on local and individual factors, including geography and expenses.

Grab and Go (GNG): Meals that can be picked up, carried out, or received via drive-through from a Congregate Meal site, and may include shelf-stable Meals.

Home Delivered Meals (HDM): Meals that are hand-delivered to the Client at the Client's place of residence.

Leftovers: Any portion of a Meal served to a Client at a Congregate Meal site that remains unconsumed. Does not include Grab-and-Go Meals, or food that has not been served.

Meal(s): Food that meets the Dietary Guidelines for Americans and Dietary Reference Intakes as set forth in section 339 of the Act (42 U.S.C. 3030g-21) and the Arizona DES Nutrition, Food Service, and Wellness Manual.

Nutrition Counseling: One-on-One consultation provided by a registered dietitian that aligns with the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, and addresses the options and methods for improving nutrition status with a measurable goal.

Nutrition Education: Written materials, demonstrations, audio-visual presentations, lectures, and small group discussions that pertain to nutrition related topics that are culturally sensitive.

Nutritional Health Screening Tool (AG-119): Form to evaluate a Client's risk for malnutrition.

Nutrition Screening: An assessment that helps to identify a Client's risk status for malnutrition. Clients who are found to be at high risk for malnutrition are referred to Nutrition Counseling.

Nutrition Service Provider (NSP): A qualified provider subcontracted by the AAA to provide congregate meals services.

Planning and Service Area (PSA): A geographic An area designated by the State Unit on Aging (SUA) for the purposes of local planning and coordination and awarding of funds.

Pre-Registration: A Client contacts the Meal site in advance to provide their information and reserve a Meal.

Social Need: Necessity caused by non-economic factors, such as physical and mental disabilities, language barriers, and cultural, social, or geographic isolation outlined in 45 CFR part §1321.3 that restrict the ability of an individual to perform normal daily tasks or threatens the capacity of the individual to live independently.

State Nutrition Coordinator: Designated SUA employee who provides State-level leadership and advocacy for nutrition services by overseeing reporting, monitoring, training, and technical assistance to ensure compliance with contracted and subcontracted NSPs.

State Performance Report (SPR): Tool used by the Administration for Community Living (ACL) to monitor the performance of Older Americans Act (OAA) programs.

V. STANDARDS

A. Overview

1. The Congregate Meals program (CNG) is a nutrition service that allows eligible Clients to remain independent in their homes by providing the following:
 - a. At least 1 Meal per day, 5 or more days per week, that is consumed in a Congregate setting with the flexibility to allow for the following:
 - i. Grab and Go (GNG) Meals complement the CNG on a special or temporary basis.
 - A. GNG Meals can only be provided when the State Plan on Aging and the Planning and Service Areas (PSA) specifically allow for GNG delivery methods; and
 - B. GNG meals cannot exceed 25 percent of the funds expended by the State Unit on Aging (SUA) and each Area Agency on Aging (AAA).
 - b. Nutrition Screening, Education, and Counseling;
 - c. Socialization with other older adults at Meal sites; and
 - d. Referrals to other home and community-based supports that the Client may benefit from based on local availability and the Client's eligibility.
2. The State Unit on Aging (SUA) administers the CNG program by providing funding, direction, and technical assistance to the State's contracted Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs).
3. AAAs contract with providers as necessary to carry out the services listed in V.A.1 of this policy.

4. CNG services are prioritized to serve Clients with the Greatest Economic and Social Need, particularly Older Adults who:
 - a. Have income below the federal poverty level;
 - b. Have a Limited English Proficiency;
 - c. Reside in rural areas; and
 - d. Have a disability.
5. Services are provided at no cost; however, Clients may make a voluntary contribution toward the costs of service(s).

B. Leftovers

1. AAAs may allow Clients to take Leftovers from the site in the Client's own container, if required. If Leftovers are allowed at a Meal site the AAA must:
 - a. Create a Leftovers policy that follows all state, county, tribal, and local health regulations, ordinances, and codes for food safety and states that food items removed from the Meal site, and the safety thereof, is the responsibility of the Client.
 - b. Ensure that Nutrition Service Providers:
 - i. Post the AAA Leftovers policy at the Meal site in an area visible to all Clients; and
 - ii. Provide information to Clients about the safe handling of Leftovers that follows guidance from SUA and U.S. Department of Agriculture (visit the [Leftovers and Food Safety](#) webpage)

C. Eligibility

1. The following individuals are eligible to receive services at a Meal site based on availability and funding:
 - a. Clients age 60 or older;
 - b. The spouse of the eligible Client regardless of age or condition;
 - c. An individual with a disability, regardless of age, who resides:
 - i. With an eligible Client and must accompany the Client to the Meal site; or
 - ii. In a housing facility where CNG Meals are served that is primarily occupied by individuals aged 60 or older.

- d. A volunteer of any age who provides services during Meal hour(s).

D. Process to Obtain Services

1. AAAs will be available for Clients seeking CNG services, at a minimum, in the following ways:
 - a. By phone, or in-person, or via web-based means of communication. The AAA must ensure their up-to-date phone number, address, and website are posted in the following places: to find out about available resources;
 - i. Area Agency on Aging Locations landing page on the [ADES website](#);
 - ii. Attending or viewing Community Education and Outreach activities that provide information regarding CNG.
2. AAAs will complete Client registration with the Clients. The AAA will support Clients by completing the registration in the most convenient way, which may include in-person, over the phone, or virtually.
 - a. The AAA will complete the Nutritional Health Screening Tool (AG-119) with the Client. The Nutritional Health Screening Tool must be completed at the following times:
 - i. Upon entry into the program; and
 - ii. Every 12 months after entering the CNG program.
 - b. When Clients are found to be at high nutritional risk, based on their Nutrition Health Screening Tool results, they must be referred to Nutrition Counseling based on the following:
 - i. The needs of the Client;
 - ii. The availability of resources; and
 - iii. The expertise of a Registered Dietician Nutritionist aligned with the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics.
3. AAAs will require Clients to sign in at the CNG Meal Site once they are authorized to receive CNG meals. Clients will be required to provide the following info:
 - a. The Client's name; and

- b. Vouch that the Client has a valid need for the GNG Meal, if applicable, and acknowledge that the GNG Meal is only provided temporarily.

VI. PROCEDURES

A. Roles and Responsibilities

1. SUA will:
 - a. Contract with AAAs to provide CNG services;
 - b. Designate a minimum portion of Title III C-1 funds specific to each Planning and Service Area (PSA) to be used by the AAA in carrying out the CNG program;
 - c. Ensure that services offered by the CNG program do not duplicate or replace services already provided by other entities in the state;
 - d. Facilitate coordination between the CNG program, Tribal organizations, and Title VI (Grants to Indian Tribes and Native Hawaiian Grantees) programs;
 - e. Create a streamlined process to provide AAAs with prior approval for contracts and commercial relationships that AAAs wish to establish;
 - f. Provide advice, training, and technical assistance to AAAs and CNG Nutrition Service Providers (NSPs) to include but not limited to:
 - i. The most recent updates to the federal rules and regulations, including the Older Americans Act (OAA); and
 - ii. The most recent [ADES Nutrition, Food Service and Wellness Manual](#) as a reference manual for nutrition services.
 - g. Oversee and carry out SUA reporting requirements for the CNG program as required by ACL; and
 - h. Perform monitoring activities as described in VI.B.1 of this policy.
2. AAA will:
 - a. Align all program policies and procedures with the most up-to-date federal rules, regulations, SUA policies, and ACL guidance;
 - b. Carry out the CNG program by awarding contract funds to NSPs that:

- i. Best demonstrate the capacity to meet the standards listed in VI.A.3 of this policy; and
 - ii. Comply with all municipal, county, state, tribal, and federal requirements related to the food service operation.
 - c. Ensure that evidence of income, a means test, or Cost Sharing is not required to determine eligibility for CNGs;
 - d. Establish procedures for voluntary contributions that meet the guidelines in DAAS Service Contributions Policy;
 - e. Conduct annual assessments of NSPs to ensure compliance with SUA requirements;
 - f. Identify, mitigate, and/or remove all Conflicts of Interest (COIs) per SUA policy guidance;
 - g. Adhere to DES fingerprinting and criminal background check requirements in VI.H of this policy;
 - h. Carry out reporting requirements assigned to the AAAs in VI.D.2 of this policy; and
 - i. Perform monitoring activities assigned to the AAAs in VI.B.2 of this policy.
- 3. Nutrition Service Providers will:
 - a. Administer effective planning and delivery of the CNG services listed in V.A.1 of this policy according to the requirements and guidance in the following documents:
 - i. The most recent [ADES Nutrition, Food Service and Health Manual](#); and
 - ii. ADES Scope of Work for CNG services.
 - b. Collect all information necessary to fulfill the data collection and reporting requirements of the SUA and AAA;
 - c. Identify, mitigate and/or remove all COI per SUA policy guidance;
 - d. Cooperate with, and provide each Client with the Client grievance/ appeals process and have a copy displayed so that it is accessible to all Clients;

- e. Enforce SUA standards for staff training, performance, annual tuberculosis testing, licensure, and certification requirements required by the AAA and SUA;
- f. Comply with all state, county, tribal, and local health regulations, ordinances, and codes for food safety; and
- g. Adhere to DES fingerprinting and criminal background check requirements in VI.H of this policy.

B. Monitoring

1. The SUA will monitor the following:
 - a. AAAs to ensure compliance with the following:
 - i. SUA program policies and procedures, contracts, and ADES scopes of work;
 - ii. Quality and effectiveness in program activities and service delivery;
 - iii. Federal regulations; and
 - iv. Additional or updated guidance material provided by ACL.
2. AAAs will monitor the following:
 - a. NSPs for compliance with the following:
 - i. SUA program policies and procedures;
 - ii. ADES Nutrition, Food Service and Wellness Manual;
 - iii. Keep menus at the meal preparation site and at the location from where the meal was delivered for at least one year after the meals have been served for annual audit purposes;
 - iv. Retain Nutrition Education documentation for at least 1 year for annual audit purposes;
 - v. Quality and effectiveness in program activities and service delivery;
 - vi. Respond to monitoring reports within 30 days;
 - vii. Initiate any necessary corrective action within 30 days; and

viii. Staff training and licensing requirements.

C. Systems, Software, and Technology

1. The AAAs must utilize the Division of Aging and Adult Reporting System (DAARS) to adhere to the ACL's Older Americans Act Performance System (OAAPS) and SUA's reporting requirements.
2. The SUA must utilize OAAPS to adhere to ACL's reporting requirements.

D. Reporting Requirements

1. SUA must:
 - a. Follow all ACL requirements for:
 - i. The State Performance Report (SPR); and
 - ii. OAAPS reports.
2. AAAs must:
 - a. Enter CNG data into DAARS by the 30th day of the following month; and
 - b. Follow all guidance and any training provided by the State Nutrition Coordinator on the topic of programmatic reporting.
3. NSPs must:
 - a. Report monthly to the AAA on the number of Meals provided to Clients; and
 - b. All Meals reported must meet the requirements listed in [45 CFR 1321.87\(d\)\(1\)\(i-v\)](#).

E. Records Management

1. AAAs and NSPs must maintain CNG program records in paper or electronic format.
2. All records, regardless of their format, must be maintained in a secure manner to protect the contents from breach, theft, or misuse. This includes:
 - a. Maintaining paper documentation in locked files; and
 - b. Securing electronic records.

3. Records and information collected by the program are maintained as confidential under A.R.S. §41-1959. This includes:
 - a. Client information;
 - b. AAA and subcontractor records; and
 - c. Information collected during an appeal.
4. Records and information maintained as confidential must not be released except as authorized under A.R.S. §41-1959.
 - a. AAA must explain to Clients that individual information and records may be shared in order to provide services.

F. Privacy, Confidentiality and Disclosure

1. HIPPA regulations must be observed when handling Protected Health Information (PHI) including:
 - a. Nutritional assessments and screenings; and
 - b. All employee, staff, and volunteer Tuberculosis records.
2. Protection and release of Confidential Information:
 - a. The transmission of Personally Identifiable Information (PII) and PHI for any Client must be transmitted using secure means such as encryption to ensure the information is not accessed by unauthorized individuals.
 - b. Disclosure of PII may only be made with the informed consent of the Client or their legal representative, unless required by law or court order, or for program monitoring by authorized agencies.
3. Address Confidentiality Program
 - a. AAA Employees and Contractors must refer to the DES Address Confidentiality Program (ACP) Policy and the DAAS ACP Policy if a Client states that they are a participant in the ACP.
 - b. If the Client is an ACP Participant, the substitute address must be accepted on all application material required for the program.

G. Conflict of Interest (COI)

1. AAAs and contracted NSPs must abide by policies and guidance regarding COIs developed by SUA and must comply with SUA's periodic review of programs for COI.

H. Fingerprinting and Criminal Background Check

1. AAA must ensure that NSPs comply with the following:
 - a. A fingerprint-based criminal background check must be completed at the time of hire or as a result of reassignment after hire, on employees and volunteers who have direct contact with juveniles or vulnerable adults including those who are mentally disabled, frail, or have a chronic disease that puts them at risk for abuse (see A.R.S. § 46-141). See also DAAS Administrative Mandates Policy.

I. Complaints, Grievances, and Appeals

1. Each AAA will develop and implement a process to:
 - a. Investigate and resolve complaints from Clients and other outside parties against AAA and NSP per DAAS Administrative Mandates Policy; and
 - b. Verify that Clients receive a copy of the grievances and appeals process.

Equal Opportunity Employer / Program • Auxiliary aids and services are available upon request to individuals with disabilities • To request this document in alternative format or for further information about this policy, contact the Division of Aging and Adult Services at 602-542-4446; TTY/TDD Services 7-1-1