



FOOD AS MEDICINE: COMBATING OLDER ADULT CHRONIC ILLNESS THROUGH MEDICALLY TAILORED MEALS

A GROWING POPULATION WITH INCREASING CHALLENGES

One in four Americans is 60 or older, with an additional 12,000 turning 60 each day. This population is projected to reach 118 million by 2060 – increasing the number of seniors today by more than half. With this growth comes changes in diversity: Older Americans of color will continue to make up an increasingly larger portion of the population.

With shifts in the population come changes in their needs. Among Americans 60 and older: 13% are veterans, 29% have a disability and 39% live alone. According to the National Council on Aging, **nearly 95% of older adults have at least one chronic condition, while nearly 80% have two or more chronic conditions.** Increasingly, older adults need access to nutritious meals and comprehensive services that can help them manage their chronic conditions.

DELIVERING TAILORED NUTRITION

Meals on Wheels services are designed to support the health and independence of older adults. The opportunity created by providing the meal – delivered to the home or at a congregate dining site – opens the door to a wealth of integrated services, including tailored nutrition, social connection, safety, and additional resources and referrals.

Tailored nutrition is one of the keys to addressing chronic illnesses and can be an asset to helping older adults live healthy and independent lives. Conditions where nutrition is vital can include hypertension, high cholesterol, arthritis, heart disease, diabetes and chronic kidney disease.

Meals on Wheels America defines medically tailored meals as fully prepared meals produced or sourced under the consultation of a Registered Dietitian Nutritionist (RDN) or state-credentialed nutrition professional to support an older adult's medical condition.

A NATIONAL PRIORITY

Implementing medically tailored meal pilots and advancing food as medicine interventions that utilize community-based senior nutrition programs is a key priority for Meals on Wheels America.

The medically tailored meal services provided by Meals on Wheels programs directly align with the national strategy released at the **2022 White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health, as well as similar bipartisan proposals in Congress.** The Administration calls for hospitals and health care providers to work with local groups and community-based organizations to help reduce hospital admissions or readmissions by offering medically tailored meals and other nutrition services.

STORIES OF SUCCESS

Local Meals on Wheels programs are already delivering on the changing needs of older adults, including providing medically tailored meals.

MEALS ON WHEELS PEOPLE – PORTLAND, OREGON

Meals on Wheels People's holistic approach to patient care includes condition monitoring, nutrition education and social connection programming, and all services are inclusive, person-first and trauma-informed. Medically tailored meals are available for Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD), diabetes, chronic heart disease and renal disorders.

MOBILE MEALS OF SOUTHERN ARIZONA – TUSCON, ARIZONA

Mobile Meals of Southern Arizona provides meals that are designed by local chefs and dietitians at partner medical facilities and tailored to health conditions. Special meal options include cardiac, diabetic, renal, cancer support, soft foods, pureed, finely chopped, gluten free, vegetarian, vegan, low sodium, low sugar, low fat, low calorie.

FRESH MEALS ON WHEELS – SHEBOYGAN, WISCONSIN

Fresh Meals on Wheels services older adults, disabled, and homebound older adults – providing them with nutrition services to enable them to remain independent and safe in their communities of choice. This organization offers a general diet and other meals tailored to meet medical needs, including heart disease, diabetes, kidney or renal disease, celiac disease, and others. All meals can be texture-modified to meet the needs of those with chewing or swallowing challenges.

WHAT IS NEEDED

More funding and support are needed to scale and provide more medically tailored meal services to our most deserving seniors. Community-based senior nutrition programs require increased resources to expand these services and pay for meal preparation, production, procurement and delivery.

We urge Congress and the Administration to expand Medicare and Medicaid beneficiaries' access to food as medicine interventions by:

1. Implementing medically tailored meal pilots and initiatives that utilize community-based senior nutrition programs, including through traditional Medicare.
2. Establishing home-delivered meals provided by community-based senior nutrition programs as a fully reimbursable benefit through Medicare, Medicare Advantage and Medicaid.

Visit www.mealsonwheelsamerica.org/agenda for our complete advocacy agenda and more information. Contact advocacy@mealsonwheelsamerica.org with any questions.