

## **Nutrition Services Stakeholder Meeting May 14, 2024**

Attendance: Erin Estey (BOA), Shana Brierley (BOA), Joel Sekorski (LHNWENP), Ellen Torgerson (AASCC), Denise Andreas (SWCAA), Mark Kovitch (New Opportunities), Gariann Chiarella (New Opportunities), Kathy Chase (ECAAA), Maureen McIntyre (NCAAA), Gretchen James (SWCAA), Nancy Isa (CRT), Rose Booker (RW Solutions), Shanie Velazquez (LifeBridge), Natasha Tetreault (Town of Enfield), Robyn Harper-Gulley (NCAAA), Stan Mingione (Estuary), Jaime Smith (CT Dept of Ag), Laura Robbins (Estuary), Jillian Ruisi (TEAM), Laura Palmieri (RW Solutions), Kathleen Nunez (TEAM), Shannon MacNeil (CRT), Maia Carpentino (Robinson + Cole), Rick Liegl (City of Meriden), Cassandra Norfleet-Johnson (DSS), Jose Carchi Maposito (WCAAA), Rhonda Evans (CAFCA)

### **Public Comment**

None.

### **Update and Recap of Prior Meeting**

S. Brierley recapped prior meeting minutes.

### **State Unit on Aging Name Change**

S. Brierley shared that the State Unit on Aging is rebranding as the Bureau of Aging (BOA). This is an effort to align with the other bureaus of the Department of Aging and Disability Services, but does not change the organizational structure, leadership, staffing, or work of the Bureau, and the BOA remains the designated State Unit on Aging.

### **Nutrition Task Force**

E. Estey shared that at the conclusion of the Nutrition Task Force, recommendations were made and SB396 has codified some of those recommendations. The bill has passed and is expected to be signed into law by the Governor with an effective date of 7/1/2024. The bill mainly concerns the Department of Aging and Disability Services (ADS) and Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs) and administrative pieces of the program. A link to the bill language was provided on the agenda. The bill includes:

1. Direction that ADS will remit payment to AAAs within 30 days of the receipt of an invoice in good order. AAAs are directed to pay their Elderly Nutrition Providers (ENPs) within 30 days, as is already reflected in contracts. The bill does state that these requirements are based on availability of funds, which reflects that Federal funding for Older Americans Act programs is rarely received at the beginning of the Federal Fiscal Year and that ADS may not have the anticipated allocated funds immediately available.
2. Requirement for AAAs to create a continuity of operations plan when a provider leaves the program or a provider changes, alert leadership of the municipalities affected, and ensure that there is no lapse in benefits. Also requires notification when there is an increase in demand, though there is the acknowledgement that demand will always outpace resources.
3. Requirement that ADS and AAAs work to streamline the contracting process and modify Consumer Registration Form to request only information that is part of federal reporting. Form 5 (Consumer Registration Form) is already being modified to remove Service Indicators section and move it to a standalone prioritization tool.

4. Requirement that ADS and DSS work together to identify consumers who may benefit from either program and make cross referrals to maximize use of SNAP by Elderly Nutrition participants. This will require a cross-match of consumers between ADS and DSS, and the agencies will need to work together to determine how to best accomplish this.

### **Changes to Service Levels, Sites, Mitigation Plans, Wait Lists**

S. Brierley reminded ENPs to work with AAAs on mitigation plans, alert AAA as soon as there are any major changes to the program or service levels or a wait list is instituted, and to alert AAA of any major program staff changes. AAA needs to alert BOA as soon as possible, which requires ENP to alert AAA as soon as possible. This will help with legislative or constituent inquiries.

### **Federal Funding Update**

E. Estey advised that final federal budget has been passed, though CT has not received the full award yet. There was an increase to congregate and home delivered meals under OAA, but there was a reduction in Nutrition Services Incentive Program (NSIP) funding, which is a performance-based award that is calculated based on the number of meals served in the prior FFY as measured against the nation as a whole. This essentially means that the program is flat funded at pre-COVID levels, and the anticipation is that the next FFY will look the same. If providers are still serving at COVID levels, they need to work to bring their service levels in line with budgets as soon as possible.

E. Estey also advised that all federal funding that is received under the OAA is allocated to the AAAs, and in turn, to community providers and that the BOA does not retain a “rainy day” fund that can be accessed later in the year for budget shortfalls. Providers need to work within the budget received from the AAA as there is no emergency funding.

### **New Older Americans Act Regulations**

E. Estey discussed the new OAA regulations, which became effective in March, though full implementation and compliance is not required until 10/1/25. New regs may require contractors and subcontractors to have policies and procedures around conflicts of interest and service deliveries. The BOA is still reviewing and learning more, but will share with the AAAs as needed, who will in turn share with ENPs. There is time, but providers should be prepared to review policies and procedures and update as necessary.

### **Reminders**

E. Estey advised that information gathered as a result of the State Performance Report (SPR) prompted a review of eligibility guidelines for the Elderly Nutrition Program. Consumers must be age 60 or over except in limited circumstances including:

1. The under-age spouse of an eligible recipient who is *receiving meals* at a congregate site or *receiving* home delivered meals.
2. An individual with a disability who is under 60 who lives with an eligible recipient who is *receiving* home delivered meals.
3. An individual with a disability who is under 60 and resides at a housing site where there is a congregate meal program.
4. Volunteers who assist at a congregate meal site.

Programs were encouraged to review their under-60 meal recipients and ensure that they meet one of the circumstances above.

E. Estey also reminded ENPs that “Eligible No ID” meals should be minimized to the extent possible. This designation is intended for one-off situations where a meal recipient will not be receiving meals on a regular basis (such as a special event) and not as a regular course of action. Consumers should not be recorded as Eligible No ID more than once – if they return for a meal, they need to complete a Form 5 or pay full price.

As S. Brierley has been performing site visits, it has been noted that not all sites have proof of training for site managers on site. E. Estey reminded everyone that site managers are required to be trained on properly food safety protocols with proof of training kept on-site at the congregate site. E. Estey also reviewed that town or city health inspectors may have different requirements than the BOA, so sites should be cognizant of those (one example was capacity signs – it’s a small violation for BOA, but a large violation for the fire marshal).

E. Estey advised that the State Plan on Aging is being drafted and will be posted for public comment in the coming weeks. The BOA encourages public comment.

#### **Invitations and Attendance**

No discussion.

#### **Other Business/Discussion**

R. Liegl inquired why some ENPs suddenly cut service without notification and asked what the process is for those decisions to be made. E. Estey responded that there is a finite amount of funding received from the federal government and the state, and ENPs are tasked with operating within those budget constraints. If money runs out, providers are unable to absorb the costs of providing the service. Therefore, programs do need to mitigate on occasion. E. Estey advised that those decisions are for the ENP to make in consultation with their AAA so as to minimize disruption, but there are times when cuts are unavoidable. Also advised that many providers ramped up service during COVID and are still working to cut back, and that demand will always outpace resources – providers simply cannot serve everyone who might otherwise qualify.

S. Mingione confirmed comments from E. Estey and said that with COVID money gone, federal funding seems to be even lower than pre-COVID, but prices continue to go up with inflation, so providers are unable to provide the same levels of service with the same amounts of money. Providers are not in a position to lose money on the program.

J. Sekorski reiterated that while providers were aware that COVID funding was sunseting, it has still been difficult to pull up on service levels and come back in line with lower levels of funding, especially where so many people came on to the program during COVID. Providers want to continue to provide meals, and do their best to do so, but will sometimes find that they are overextended, and are then forced to make difficult decisions about cuts.

J. Smith gave an update on the Senior Farmer’s Market Nutrition Program. Though there were challenges with SoliSystems, the electronic benefits processor used last year, Ag will continue to work with them this year. The approach has been revised so that distribution partners can assign benefits and

cards directly to participants, who will be able to reuse cards. If a distribution partner has a need of new cards, those cards should be en route shortly. The Farmer's Market season will begin early, on June 1, this year, so participants will be able to leverage additional time to buy spring crops. Any questions regarding the SFMNP can be directed to Allison Hughes and provided contact information in the chat ([allison.hughes@ct.gov](mailto:allison.hughes@ct.gov)). J. Sekorski asked about new or lapsed distribution sites rejoining the program and how they can get their ID number. J. Smith advised that Allison should be able to assist with that, to which J. Sekorski confirmed that he has been in contact with her.

**Next meeting Tuesday, August 13 at 1:00pm**