

**Department of Aging and Disability Services
State Unit on Aging
Nutrition Service Stakeholder Meeting Minutes**

Tuesday, May 23, 2023

1:00pm – 2:30pm

Virtual TEAMS Meeting

Attendees: Erin Harkrader (SUA), Margaret Gerundo-Murkette (SUA), Jannett Haughton (SUA), Shana Brierley (SUA), Jennifer Proto (ADS), Marie Allen (SWCAA), Tyler Anderson (Robinson + Cole), Denise Andreas (SWCAA), Megan Baker (Asian Pacific American Affairs Policy Analyst – CWCSEO), Kathy Chase (Senior Resources), Jean Cronin (Hughes & Cronin – Community Action Agencies), Alison Dvorak (Senior Resources), Dan Giacomi (DSS Interim Director, Program Oversight and Grants Administration), Robyn Harper-Gulley (NCAAA), Mark Kovitch (NOI), Rick Liegl (City of Meriden), Maureen McIntyre (NCAAA), Stan Mingione (Estuary Council of Seniors), Cassandra Norfleet-Johnson (DSS), Deb Polun (CAFCA), Deb Monahan (TVCCA), Spring Raymond (WCAAA), Joel Sekorski (LHNWENP), Andre Scott (City of Hartford), Natasha Tetreault (Town of Enfield – Mark Twain Congregate), Eugene Theroux (TVCCA), Karen Weseliza (Office of Rep. Joe Courtney)

Meeting began at 1:06

Public Comment

No comments

Update and Recap of Prior Meeting

Reviewed prior meeting minutes and all attendees were reminded of purpose of meetings

Funding and Payment Schedule

M. Gerundo-Murkette reviewed Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) funding schedule and advised that when FFY begins on October 1, there is usually not an approved budget and federal government continues to work under Continuing Resolutions (CRs). The Administration for Community Living (ACL) issues a CR award letter as each new CR is authorized, and that contains the funding amount for the limited time of the CR. If AAAs have carryover funds that were not expended during the previous FFY, those funds are available upon request. Once the federal budget is approved, it takes ACL about 6-8 weeks to send the “big annual award” letter to the State Unit on Aging. Once SUA receives the award letters from ACL, it takes about 2 weeks for the funding to come to OPM and go into CORE and for Fiscal to prepare the allocation chart which is then sent to AAAs. Once funding is available and allocation charts are sent, SUA pays AAAs as funds are requested. How funding goes from AAA to subcontractors is a contract question between those parties. State Fiscal Year (SFY) starts July 1, and state funds can be paid quarterly. Nutrition Services Incentive Program (NSIP) funds are awarded based on number of meals served, and while this award is sometimes part of the “big annual award” it can sometimes come separately at a later time. SSBG funds are also received from DSS as the funds are available.

D. Monahan raised that the funding schedule is difficult because the elderly nutrition program runs on a reimbursement basis and providers are not paid in advance, but still have to pay staff and vendors, making it hard to stay afloat. Asked if state funds can be paid differently or used first to cover the gap

when federal government is under CR. M. Gerundo-Murkette advised that SUA is definitely looking at this and has made inquiries about changing the state nutrition fund flow.

S. Mingione remarked that money has to come from somewhere, as ENPs have to pay vendors, and questioned if the answer becomes to stop serving, which is not what anybody wants.

M. Allen confirmed that AAA/ENP contracts say payment to ENPs within 30 days given available funds but that delay in FFY makes that impossible at times. Asked if this can be put on the agenda with OPM and M. Gerundo-Murkette confirmed that SUA is going through internal channels to raise the issue with OPM.

M. Kovitch stated that the state may need to borrow from itself and that OPM can borrow from itself, pay itself interest, and take indirect and that this is something that should be explored – advancing monies expected from the federal government.

D. Polun asked what other states are doing, and if advocacy needs to be focused on the feds. M. Gerundo-Murkette advised that other states have the same challenges as CT when it comes to FFY and federal budget. Advised that SUA's role is administration, not advocacy, but AAAs and ENPs can work among themselves to move this forward.

D. Monahan raised the idea of the group (AAAs and ENPs) advocating with OPM.

Several remarks that the information regarding the funding and payment flow was helpful.

Allocations and Intrastate Funding Formula (IFF)

E. Harkrader reviewed that CT consists of 5 planning and service areas (PSAs), each of which is covered by an Area Agency on Aging (AAA). The allocations to each AAA are determined by the IFF, which looks at the demographics of each region, using census data, and then “weights” the demographic data according to Older Americans Act (OAA) target demographics of “greatest economic need” and “greatest social need”. ACL and the OAA mandate that states target those specific areas, and because there is not enough funding to serve all who might qualify, states are responsible to target those key demographics. E. Harkrader advised that the census data is updated with each state plan, but the formula has not changed. Advised to look at State Plan on Aging for more comprehensive overview of how IFF is calculated.

M. Kovitch noted that current State Plan uses 2010 census data. E. Harkrader confirmed that this is correct – the State Plan utilizes the most recent decennial census data, but may look at 5-year estimates as well. Advised that 2020 decennial census data has not been released by US Census Bureau, but we are hopeful that it will be released before we start the next State Plan on Aging.

Public Act No. 22-32 Data Collection and July Report

E. Harkrader advised that SUA is working on drafting the report with an anticipated first draft by June 1 for review by Commissioner. Advised that because this is a publicly available document, it can be provided to all AAAs and ENPs (as well as anybody else on the call). E. Harkrader thanked all of the ENPs on the call for their work in answering SUA questions and providing requested data. Discussed that challenge of report is to represent an overall picture of the state Elderly Nutrition Program while making it clear that each region is different and each provider is different, with no current “one size fits all”

solution. Advised that we want to provide the best education to the legislature as possible, as Nutrition is always a focus and legislators do not always understand the complexities of the program.

Prioritization Guidelines

E. Harkrader advised that SUA is still working on prioritization guidelines. The current Consumer Registration Form (Form 5) contains the tool to do prioritization, after much research by J. Haughton and the question now becomes how to turn the theoretical tool into practical application, whether it's through a "scoring rubric" or through WellSky. Advised that we are looking at how other states have put wait lists and prioritization strategies into practice and working with WellSky to see what likelihood of using our MIS system for prioritization is.

J. Haughton remarked that one of the challenges in instituting prioritization guidelines is that the original tool that was created as part of the revamped Form 5 was critiqued by AAAs and ENPs as too much, and when changes had to be made, it changed the calculation of the prioritization tool.

S. Mingione advised that existing Form 5 does not collect the information that would assist with prioritization because consumers "make up" information in an effort to get through it more quickly.

M. Allen stated that the existing Form 5 is still too long and repetitive and not a good tool. Asked if we can have a workgroup to discuss and look for Evidence-Based tool to use. E. Harkrader advised SUA can look at putting work group together but pointed out that all information up to and including ADLs/IADLs is required by ACL as part of State Performance Report (SPR) reporting. J. Haughton reminded that DETERMINE checklist (Nutrition Risk) is also part of SPR reporting, which leaves Service Indicators as the only section that is not used for SPR.

PHE Unwinding and Meal Flexibilities

E. Harkrader discussed that PHE officially ended in May, but states have some latitude in how they wind up COVID services and flexibilities. Advised that we can continue to use COVID services and service definitions through September 20, 2023, after which they will be discontinued. Advised that AAAs and ENPs need to look at grab-and-go meals and reminded everyone that grab-and-go meals are considered C-2 (HDM) meals rather than congregate (C-1) meals and pull from that allocation – SUA can create a Grab-and-Go meal designation that is linked to Title III C-2 funding ID, however, everyone needs to consider if this use of funding takes away from our target populations. Advised that this is ACL directive that they are C-2 meals, and that unless OAA regulations are changed, this will remain the rule.

S. Mingione said that grab-and-go has been a game changer for their congregate program – 40 people who would otherwise not attend the congregate program received meals today.

D. Monahan pointed out that a lot of older adults are still scared to go back to senior centers and congregate sites and grab-and-go provides food to these seniors.

K. Weseliza remarked that she has heard from many constituents for whom the grab-and-go meals are a lifeline and that they depend on these meals, but the funding is a real concern. Advised that she is taking all this information back to Rep. Courtney.

K. Chase raised the point that with a finite amount of funding, grab-and-go meals likely are not meeting the intention of the program and that when the funding is gone, there is no more funding and programs

need to evaluate priority areas. Grab-and-go is great, but it may not be realistic to continue at these levels.

J. Haughton discussed that, per ACL, if grab-and-go consumers eat together as part of an event (virtual or in-person) planned by the ENP, can count as congregate C-1 meal. (ACL decision tree: <https://acl.gov/sites/default/files/nutrition/Title%20III%20C1%20and%20C2%20Service%20Delivery%20Decision%20Tree%206.15.22%20508.pdf>) It was requested to provide this decision tree via email, which E. Harkrader did following call.

J. Sekorski offered that from conversations with ACL and Bob Blancato from NANASP, it appears unlikely that any of these regulations will be changed without a White House Summit on Aging.

Other Resources

E. Harkrader advised will check with Jaime Smith, not on call, regarding resource guide and send to group when it has been provided.

Invitations and Attendance

E. Harkrader reminded all in attendance that these are public meetings and to please forward invitations to anyone you think should attend or send an email with their name for inclusion on the invitation list. Also stressed that it would be great if we could have an older adult consumer join us, as they are the end-user and true stakeholder of the elderly nutrition program.

Other Business

No other business. Next meeting is Tuesday, August 8 at 1:00pm.

Meeting adjourned at 2:07pm.