



# Meal requirements for in-home aged care - Factsheet

This is a summary of the aged care provider guidance for the requirement for in-home meals, snacks and drinks under the New Aged Care Act.

## Overview

The *Aged Care Act 2024* (the new Act) sets out a condition of registration for registered aged care providers delivering meals, snacks and drinks to an older person's home or as part of community, centre-based and cottage respite. This applies to providers delivering services under the Support at Home Program, Commonwealth Home Support Program, Multi-Purpose Service Program and the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Flexible Aged Care Program if they are registered in registration categories 1 and/or 4.

## What providers must do

Providers must ensure meals, snacks and drinks delivered to older people through government-funded aged care services are nutritious and appetising, having regard to the older person's needs and preferences.

**Nutritious** meals, snacks and drinks helps prevent malnutrition and can support older people to remain independent in their own home for longer. Older people aged 65 years and over, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 50 years and over, have unique dietary needs. For example, people in these age groups generally have higher requirements for protein, calcium and vitamins B6 and D. Meals, snacks and drinks developed for specialised dietary needs should be appropriate for the needs and preferences of those older people.

**Appetising** meals, snacks and drinks means having an appealing aroma, appearance and taste. Providers are not required to meet every unique individual preference (such as dislike of certain ingredients). However, providers should ensure the types of meals, snacks and drinks are clearly communicated, including how they may cater to specific preferences. Feedback from older people must be taken into account by providers under the Quality Assurance Framework outlined below. This ensures the views of the older people are considered and their feedback is used to improve meals, snacks and drinks.

**Having regard for the needs and preferences of older people** means the meals, snacks and drinks should generally support the assessed needs and preferences of each older person. For an older person without specific dietary needs, this means ensuring meals, snacks and drinks support the nutrition needs of older people as a cohort, such as higher requirements for protein. For older people with specialised dietary needs, providers must have regard for this when delivering meals, snacks and drinks and make available suitable menu options.

## Dietitian Assessment

Providers must, at least annually, have a dietitian assess the meals, snacks and drinks delivered to ensure that any meals, snacks and drinks:

- (a) are appetising
- (b) are appropriate for the nutrition needs of older people accessing funded aged care services, including older people with specialised dietary needs
- (c) reflect evidence-based guidelines and practice.

Onsite dietitian assessment is recommended to enable assessment of texture, taste, presentation, aroma and cooking methodology. However, where access to a dietitian is limited, such as in rural and remote areas, assessment can be conducted remotely.

The role of providers is to engage a dietitian and provide information to support assessments of menus, recipes, portion sizes, cooking methods, older person feedback, photos and videos. Dietitians should assess meals, snacks and drinks against nutritional, sensory, medical, cultural and religious expectations. Dietitians will review meals, snacks and drinks using contemporary, evidence-based guidelines and practice. Assessment findings should be provided to the provider to support them to continuously improve their services.

## Quality Assurance Framework

The provider must implement a Quality Assurance Framework to continuously improve the meals, snacks and drinks delivered to older people through the funded aged care services by taking into account:

- (a) the satisfaction of older people with the meals, snacks and drinks they are provided
- (b) the assessments and recommendations of the dietitian.

Providers can develop the Quality Assurance Framework in a format that suits their unique organisational needs, and this may include incorporating it into existing systems and processes for quality assurance. The Quality Assurance Framework should be regularly reviewed to ensure it remains effective and fit for purpose.

The Quality Assurance Framework should inform continuous improvement to meals, snacks and drinks taking into account the recommendations of dietitians. The Quality Assurance Framework must include feedback from older people, which can be through surveys, phone calls, workshops or face-to-face conversations. This should collect information on older people's satisfaction with the quality, variety and suitability of meals, snacks and drinks to the older person.

## Compliance

The Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission is the national aged care regulator and is responsible for regulation of provider responsibilities under the new Act, including the meal requirements.

Providers are responsible for ensuring they meet the meal requirements even when third party services are used to produce meals, snacks and drinks.

Providers can demonstrate compliance through supporting documentation such as the review undertaken by dietitians, how they implemented feedback and evidence of implementing a Quality Assurance Framework.

Where a third party is used, providers remain responsible for meeting their responsibilities. They can demonstrate this by seeking evidence from third parties.

## Further information

Read the detailed in-home meal requirements guidance: [Meal requirements for in-home aged care - Guidance for aged care providers](#)

**Food, Nutrition and Dining Hotline:** Call 1800 844 044 (Monday to Friday 9am-5pm AEST) for advice on food and nutrition, including meals delivered as part of in-home aged care and community settings.

**Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission:** [Food, nutrition & dining: resources for providers](#)

**NSW Government:** [Eating well guide for older people and carers](#)

**Tasmanian Government:** [Resources for centre based and home delivered meals](#)