

Position Statement on Food Services and the future of block funding

The membership of Western Sydney/Nepean Food Forum consists of Commonwealth Home Support Program (CHSP) funded Food Services, CHSP dietitians and other interested service providers from Western Sydney and Nepean regions. It is convened by Western Sydney Community Forum. The following position statement has been developed from consultations with participating Food Services (see attached list) and offers a perspective on the path forward for this sector.

Position Statement

The provision of a delivered meal by CHSP funded Food Services to an older person living in the community is much more than what is currently recognised within funding guidelines and output measurement frameworks. Output measures only currently equate to meal preparation, ingredients and delivery costs. We need to broaden this recognition to reflect the value and cost efficiency of what is really offered to vulnerable older people. In addition to nutritious meals being delivered to a person's home, the person and his/her carers can benefit from additional services such as: regular and ongoing safety and health checks, social contact and interaction, the building of relationships with a volunteer member of their community, assistance with odd jobs, early intervention where a person's needs change, and referrals to other services (via My Aged Care). Supports are individually-focussed, based on the needs of the person and the individual relationships built with the volunteer. In essence, what is being offered is a '**Community Essentials Package**', much more than just a meal. Table 1 in pages 2-3 below demonstrates that the social, health and monetary value of this Package is far greater than what can be provided by a regular commercial provider in an "open market" environment.

This is only possible due to the specific nature of Food Services, being embedded in local communities with the vast majority of services provided by volunteers. There has been much research validating the importance of volunteerism in local communities for all involved. The 'social capital' benefits are well-documented and are clearly linked to an improved quality of life for individuals and communities. In addition, the cost efficiencies of delivering services with the help of volunteers have enabled Food Services to provide this 'Community Essentials Package' within current structures, despite funding being based on output measures which really only take into account the 'meal'. Food Services in Western Sydney/Nepean have also been instrumental in developing and implementing innovative solutions such as 'Dining out', the Social Lunch Initiative and the Regional Distribution Centre, to increase choice and diversity, all within current funding. This is largely due to the flexibility and stability offered by current block funding arrangements, within the context of volunteer organisations.

From both a financial and societal point of view, it is imperative that the benefits of Food Services offerings not be lost in the development of modelling for Aged Care Reform. As has been identified as far back as the *Productivity Commission Inquiry Report 2011 Caring for Older Australians*, there is a place for continued block funding particularly in relation to organisations that engage volunteers.

Position:

Members of the Western Sydney/Nepean Food Forum believe and strongly recommend -

- (1) That block funding arrangements continue for Food Services, and**
- (2) That time frames be extended for the amalgamation of CHSP and Home Care Packages until 2021. This is to ensure that effective, realistic and sustainable models for a streamlined aged care system are developed, trialled and implemented in a manner that does not adversely affect older people and does not reduce the widely acknowledged value and cost effectiveness of volunteer-based services.**

The details

What are the value add-ons for a delivered meal?

Commonly, when a meal is delivered to an older person the following value add-ons are provided, based on the individual person's situation.

- A focus on the nutritional needs of individuals – achieved by linking up with dietitians as required and providing appropriately prepared foods based on individual needs; e.g. one client requiring low sodium, low potassium, low saturated fats and low phosphate, overseen by the hospital dietician. Unlike supermarket meals, suppliers used by Food Services employ nutritionists and provide meals to a high nutritional standard to enable better health and longevity. The current model also allows for a commitment by services to continuous quality improvement in nutritional standards according to the needs of frail aged people.
- Social contact and friendly chat with the client (anywhere between 5 and 30 minutes on average, depending on the needs of the client, the length of the run and the number of clients on it).
- A physical and psychological well-being check of the person and carer – the volunteer checks whether there has been any deterioration in their situation or health. Has medical care been accessed, when required? This is a vital communication link in identifying and organising support both through informal supports such as family/friends and neighbours, through to other services that prevents early hospitalisation.
- As the volunteers can sometimes be the only source of contact within a whole day, clients confide in them and advise them of any difficulties they may be experiencing or concerns they may have.
- Communication with coordinator where there is an issue or change in the status of the older person. The coordinator will then follow up with further contact, and a referral, where required.
- Volunteers, while dropping off meals, will assist clients with packing their fridges and freezers where appropriate, and check that meals are not past their use-by-date. They also often clean fridges and microwaves if the person is unable to do so. Support is provided to people by heating meals with extra support given to those with dementia. Visually impaired clients may be assisted by installing 'instruction dots' to assist with heating meals.
- Odd jobs such as removal of household rubbish, retrieval of local papers, and other basic hygiene assistance that prevents negative consequences for the client.
- In community restaurants, volunteers assist with the meal preparation, set up tables, serve meals and are responsible for clearing away. Significant in this whole process is their connection with clients as they serve the meals, having a chat and developing social connections and relationships.

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Case Studies

SCENARIO 1

Gerald C receives a Meals On Wheels service once a week since the passing of his wife. Whilst delivering meals, the volunteer, Judy, offers to place his meals in the freezer and asks permission to check any use-by-dates. At this point Judy recognises several items are past their use-by-dates and with permission, discards the items. She also explains that a couple of items on the bench need to be kept in the fridge. During a chat, Gerald explains he is finding it hard to get around and keep the place tidy due to his reduced mobility and is getting a little depressed. Judy offers to inform the office and that there may be a possibility of gaining some assistance for domestic support. She also asks if he would be interested in going on social outings with support. Gerald agrees to this and appreciates it. Judy takes out the full bin of rubbish in the kitchen and notices that the three rear steps are reasonably high and without a railing. She says with a smile that she will see him again next week. On returning to the office, Judy communicates her experience.

Client Liaison Officer calls Gerald to explain My Aged Care and with his permission, submits a referral for social support, domestic assistance & home modifications.

After being assessed, Gerald receives domestic assistance, receives a safe railing for the steps and commences social outings at a local luncheon club which significantly improves his wellbeing.

SCENARIO 2

One of our clients recently was discharged from hospital with significant Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease. She was placed on a ComPacks package and was told she would have continuity of support after six weeks. She began receiving support to clean her house, do her shopping and receive meals. After six weeks, all other services except meals ceased and she had no knowledge of whether she was to receive other supports. Her family referred her to My Aged Care and she was assessed for the above mentioned supports. We, as a Food Service, continued her support by providing weekly frozen meals. Other services took up the referrals for housecleaning and shopping/social support but never provided the service. Five weeks after her ComPacks package was finished it was brought to our notice, and the family cancelled the referral for social support and we took it up. Now our Service not only provides meals for her which are delivered by our volunteers, but two of our volunteers (a husband and wife) take her out each Thursday to do her food shopping, buy coffee/lunch and assist her in carrying her groceries back to her flat. After six weeks, she is still waiting for assistance to clean her home, despite numerous phone calls by her family to the RAS and other community services.

Costings of Value Add-ons

In addition to the cost of a meal, ingredients and meal delivery, typical value add-ons provided by a meal delivery service have been estimated below to indicate the cost efficiency provided by the volunteer based Food Services.

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Table 1. Comparison between Meals on Wheels (MOW) service and estimated full cost of value added items of a typical Food Service (based on Case Study – Scenario 1 above)

Value Add-On Item	Cost to MOW service	Estimated full cost recovery
Average cost of a main meal (main and dessert) compared to a commercial meal of same nutritional value	\$6.51	\$10.00
Meal delivery by volunteer including social support, mileage, training and other support as compared to commercial delivery @minimum wage permanent part time for 1 hour plus social support and mileage	\$1.66	\$47.44
Odd jobs – equipment check, heating meals plus social support hours. Up to 1 hour as per Case Study – Scenario 1	\$1.66	\$47.44
Client Liaison Officer referral to My Aged Care and establishing ongoing social support (ie referral for home modifications and luncheon club) for 1 hour	\$34.59	\$34.59
Luncheon Club social support time 4 hours by volunteer plus voucher as compared to 4 hours labour @ minimum wage Permanent part time + seniors lunch for worker	\$6.60	\$91.28
Total cost comparison	\$51.02	\$230.75

Preventative Care Model

The preventative care model adopted by Food Services aims to assist people, in the short or long term, who are frail, recovering from an illness or have a disability, as well as carers who assist them. It aims to minimise the frequency and length of hospitalisation of older people. The following article from the Meals on Wheels Australia Website (<http://mealsonwheels.org.au/about/>) highlights some key points and benefits of this model.

“Preventative Care Saves Government Millions

A mounting body of evidence suggests that our preventative care model supports older adults’ desire to remain in their own homes (see Meals on Wheels America study in ‘Research’ section below [see weblink above]. Meals on Wheels is operationally cost effective, and the downstream financial benefits are increasingly supported by independent research. If one of our customers is showing any physical or psychological decline, our ‘duty of care’ acts as an alert system. Early intervention often prevents falls and or hospitalisation. It’s worth considering that one night in hospital costs approximately \$1000 and the cost of a fall is upwards of \$90,000. In the UK, after cost cutting to local governments, there has been a dramatic decline in the number of people receiving meals from 75,885 in 2010/2011 to 29,605 in 2013/14. During the same period there was a 34.2% increase in hospital admissions due to malnutrition. Increasingly, the evidence is pointing to the fact that this kind of governmental cost shifting is counter-productive.”

Utilizing volunteers – the benefits

As indicated in the position statement above, the benefits of volunteering in communities is well researched and validated. The following excerpt from NSW Meals on Wheels Association’s submission to

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the *Productivity Commission Public Inquiry Increasing Your Choice in Home Care Stage 1* in July 2016 highlights the broader benefits:

“...volunteers are a symptom of what might be regarded as an important indicator of a healthy society and civitas. They undertake some very important functions within any community, apart from the specific work that they undertake. We have all become aware in more recent times of what is called social capital. That is a vital set of relationships of trust and reciprocity that underlies functional communities. We know that where social capital is high, interpersonal violence, criminality, drug taking, mental and physical illness and suicide have a much lower incidence and cost those communities vastly less than where social capital has declined or disappeared. Volunteering is about strengthening that social capital, which can in economic terms, be equally if not more important than physical and financial capital in making for a healthy environment for dynamic economic activity and growth.

That suggests that every effort should be made by the community itself and by government, to foster and protect that volunteering spirit and effort.’

It should also be noted that volunteers involved in Food Services are very much locally based and embedded in their local communities, which ensures that the experiences of clients and the service is enhanced by a strong connectedness with the local community. Block funding enables the flexibility of this model to build on these social connections.

The Meals on Wheels model is also an attractive option for volunteering. Without this option, many volunteers would be less likely to offer their services, thus reducing the social capital benefits to our communities.

To illustrate the volunteer utilization within a typical Meals on Wheels Association and the cost efficiencies provided, Nepean Food Services provided the following details.

- The service has over 600 clients
- Over 48,000 meals are provided directly to clients in 2015 – 2016.
- Over 95 volunteers are engaged with the service. This equates to 190 hours per week volunteer labour at minimum wage \$17.70 = \$174,876 per year.

The provision of block funding post July 2018 will enable organisations to continue to engage volunteers in a flexible and responsive manner, ensuring social capital benefits as well as providing cost effective services to older people. It also provides the flexibility of funds to provide volunteer infrastructure such as volunteer training and recognition processes.

Innovation and flexibility

Food Services in Western Sydney/Nepean have been able to develop innovative models to ensure the diversity of meal provision and these models continue to grow and are continuously adapted to meet the needs of people. This is only made possible by the provision of block funding, where the financial security offered allows organisations to explore, trial and share innovative ideas and projects across the sector to improve outcomes for older people. Examples in Western Sydney and Nepean include:-

- Let's Dine Out – this is a program that encourages seniors to socialise in the community over a meal. The program allows individuals to purchase a voucher for \$6.60 and receive a meal up to \$12 at over twenty two local establishments. The benefits of socialising with others include improved mental health and general well-being. In addition to the social aspect, a quality meal from reputable restaurants, cafés and clubs provides valuable nutrition. Nepean Food Services has partnered with over 22 local establishments that have joined the program, enabling choice and convenience. They can be used during a transported outing from our organisation or

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individually at any time. Nepean Food Services pays the establishment \$12 per voucher and recoups the difference through our funding. The benefits both short term and long term of this service to individuals in the local area has been immeasurable. Due to its success in the Nepean area, Parramatta Food Services is currently piloting the scheme in their region.

- Social Lunch Initiative – introduced by City of Parramatta Food Services, this involves individual matching of a volunteer with a client and the sharing of meals. Not only does this provide a mechanism for enhancing communication and monitoring well-being of the people involved (clients and carers), it provides the foundation to building trust, building relationships with the community and increasing a sense of belonging for all. This initiative transcends the ‘delivery of food’ into the ‘delivery of experiences’, by sharing meals in a social setting.
- Regional Distribution Centre – Nepean Food Services Regional Distribution Program enables clients from across Greater Sydney and Regional NSW to access a much wider range of meals from their smaller Meals on Wheels service providers. Smaller service providers struggle with limited freezer space and the inability to order food supplies by the pallet. Nepean Food Services alleviates this by providing these services with a coordinated delivery comprised of various meals from a host of accredited suppliers at a time and quantity that suits. This ensures that the people supported in those areas are able to choose meals to suit their various dietary and cultural requirements.

Most importantly, the flexibility of Food Services to be able to respond quickly and flexibly when there is an emergency or fluctuating need, or when people are unable to pay in the short term, is essential to ensure the safety net for more vulnerable older people. This is particularly relevant in parts of Western Sydney/Nepean where financial disadvantage is significant. Block funding enables services to apply funding flexibly to meet this emergency, short term or fluctuating need as required.

Conclusion

It is imperative that a future Aged Care system, combining Home Care Packages and CHSP, can ensure that the cost efficiency and the social capital benefits provided by volunteer-based Food Services as outlined above is not lost. Sufficient time needs to be taken to enable the Department and the sector to develop and test appropriate models for service delivery. Members of the Western Sydney/Nepean Food Forum, therefore, believe that block funding arrangements must continue for Food Services, and time frames be extended for the amalgamation of CHSP and Home Care Packages until 2021 so that effective, realistic and sustainable models for a streamlined aged care system are developed, trialled and implemented in a manner that does not adversely affect older people and does not reduce the widely acknowledged value and cost effectiveness of volunteer based services.

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On behalf of
Western Sydney/Nepean Food Forum
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Attachment

List of Food Services involved in the development of this Position Statement

- Holroyd Nutrition Services Food Services
- City of Parramatta Food Services
- Nepean Food Services
- Auburn Meals on Wheels
- Blue Mountains Food Services
- Blacktown Meals on Wheels
- Hawkesbury Colo Meals on Wheels Inc
- NSW Meals on Wheels Association