

Home and Community-Based Services for Florida's Seniors: Congregate and Home-Delivered Meals¹

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Introduction

This publication is part of the Home and Community-Based Services for Florida's Seniors series, a collection of educational resources designed to inform the public about home and community-based support services available to seniors in Florida.

The Older Americans Act of 1965 (OAA) provides a variety of home and community-based services for eligible older Americans (those aged 60 years or older, as defined by the OAA) that are channeled through the Administration on Aging (AoA) and state-level units on aging. In the state of Florida, these services are administered and implemented through Florida's Aging Network, which comprises the Florida Department of Elder Affairs (DOEA) and a host of 58 nonprofit organizations.

As the older adult population of Florida continues to grow rapidly, it is increasingly important that the state's seniors, their caregivers, other stakeholders, and the general public understand the home and community-based services and protections available through the 58 nonprofits — 11 Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs) and 47 Community Care for the Elderly (CCE) lead agencies — that make up Florida's Aging Network.

Congregate and Home-Delivered Meals: Available Services

Congregate and home-delivered meal programs are established by Title IIIC1 and Title IIIC2, respectively, of the OAA, which together form a portion of Title III's funding for state and community programs on aging (ACL, 2021). Title IIIC authorizes this national Senior Nutrition Program with the goal of reducing hunger, food insecurity, and malnutrition to promote the continued health and well-being of older adults. In addition to meal provision, Title IIIC also establishes nutritional screening, education, and counseling.

The Senior Nutrition Program is implemented differently in each community based on its needs and available resources. The program is personalized to the needs of older adults. Some meal providers can make meals for special diets such as low-salt or diabetic diets. The staff and volunteers also get to know the seniors they serve, allowing them to identify any changes in health and provide nutrition screening, education, and counseling when needed (ACL, 2025). Meals provided under this program are free of charge and meet the standards set by the current Dietary Guidelines for Americans. Below is a sample menu for one community service provider in Martin County.

Sample Monthly Meals on Wheels Menu				
Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
• Chicken cacciatore • Pasta • Italian vegetable blend • Bread • Banana+ • Healthy heart spread • Milk	• Chicken Cordon Bleu • Rice* • Corn Niblets+ • Peas and carrots • Bread • Fresh fruit+ • Healthy heart spread	• Beef stew • Mashed potatoes • Baby green peas • Bread • Fruit cup+ • Healthy heart spread • Milk	• Chicken parmesan w/ pasta • Italian vegetable blend • Bread • Fruit cup+ • Healthy heart spread • Milk	• Stuffed peppers w/ tomato sauce • O'brien potatoes • Bread • Fruit cup+ • Healthy heart spread • Milk
• Italian sausage • Onions and peppers • O'brien potatoes • Hot dog roll • Fruit cup+ • Healthy heart spread • Milk	• Chicken a 'la king • Rice* • 5-way vegetable blend • Bread • Fruit cup+ • Healthy heart spread • Milk	• Cheeseburger w/ onions • O'brien potatoes • Spinach* • Bread • Fruit cup+ • Healthy heart spread • Milk	• Swedish meatballs • Egg noodles* • Bread • Fruit cup+ • Healthy heart spread • Milk	• Meat & cheese lasagna • Sauteed carrots & peas* • Sliced peaches* • Fresh fruit+ • Bread • Heart healthy spread • Milk
• Meatloaf • Mashed potatoes • Chopped spinach* • Bread • Fruit cup+ • Healthy heart spread • Milk	• Southern pulled pork • BBQ baked beans • Sauteed collard greens*+ • Bread • Fruit cup+ • Healthy heart spread • Milk	• Pork chops w/ spiced apples • Mashed sweet potatoes • Sauteed green beans+ • Bread • Fruit cup+ • Healthy heart spread • Milk	• Beef stroganoff • Buttered noodles • California blend*+ • Bread • Fruit cup+ • Healthy heart spread • Milk	• BBQ chicken • Sweet potato* • Sauteed green beans+ • Bread • Pears+ • Healthy heart spread • Milk
• Baked ham • Roast yams* • Collard greens+ • Bread • Apple sauce+ • Healthy heart spread • Milk	• Chili Mac • 5-way vegetable blend • Bread • Mandarin oranges+ • Healthy heart spread • Milk	• Chicken marsala • Mashed potatoes • Peas and carrots • Bread • Fruit cocktail+ • Healthy heart spread • Milk	• Sweet and sour chicken • Rice • Oriental vegetables+ • Bread • Apple sauce+ • Healthy heart spread • Milk	• Turkey patty w/ cranberry • Roast yams • Green beans+ • Bread • Fresh fruit+ • Healthy heart spread • Milk
Meal Pattern Requirement: (Meals provide a minimum of 1/2 RDA).	Meat or alternative = 4oz cooked, edible portion Vegetables and Fruit = 4(1/1) portions	Bread or Equivalent = 1 serving Fat = 1 teaspoon	*denotes vitamin A requirement	+denotes vitamin C requirement

Figure 1. Sample monthly Meals on Wheels menu.

Credit: Council on Aging of Martin County.

Congregate Meals

Congregate meals are those provided at least once a day in a group setting, such as in senior centers, churches, restaurants, schools, or other community settings (Stone, 2023).

Congregate meals serve the three primary purposes of providing a higher-quality diet to older adults, increasing their level of food security, and providing them with social connections. Social connection is a critical part of a senior's physical and mental health, because social isolation is linked to serious illnesses including high blood pressure and early-onset dementia (Mabli et al., 2018). Furthermore, congregate meal sites often provide seniors with access to health and wellness programs such as weekly exercise classes, social activities, and other senior services.

There are about 300 different congregate meal sites across the state of Florida. Find a meal site near you by

contacting the Elder Helpline at 1-800-96-ELDER (1-800-963-5337).

Home-Delivered Meals

Home-delivered meals, such as those through Meals on Wheels, are brought by qualified nutrition providers to older adults in their homes. These meals can also be picked up from community locations; however, the program is directed towards individuals who have difficulty leaving their homes and cooking for themselves.



Figure 2. A smiling older man has a snack with the assistance of a caregiver.

Credit: © amorn/Adobe Stock.

Importantly, this home visit also acts as a critical wellness check on the individual's health. Staff and volunteers who provide these meals can monitor the well-being of older adults and connect them with other OAA services when needed. Additionally, home-delivered meals provide recipients with social connection that they might not receive otherwise. In a 2024 survey, 93% of respondents who received home-delivered meals reported that the program helped them to live independently (ACL, 2025).

Eligibility Criteria

Both congregate and home-delivered meals are available to all adults aged 60 and older, and, in some cases, to their spouses and caregivers of any age (ACL, 2021). However, these programs prioritize individuals who have low income, live in rural communities, are at risk of institutional care, or have limited English proficiency (ACL, 2021). Additionally, the home-delivered nutrition program prioritizes homebound individuals. Many organizations that provide home-delivered meals also allow seniors to purchase meals directly if they do not qualify for funded meals.

Requirements

To access these services, potential recipients must fill out paperwork that assesses their needs and determines their eligibility and priority to receive such services.

These forms seek to identify the client's conditions and resources regarding the following factors: mental health, physical health, activities of daily living, nutrition status, health, caregiver status, social support, and environmental risks (DOEA, 2020). The assessment of these factors generates a risk score that is used to place clients in the priority consumer list for the Florida

Department of Elder Affairs. Priority is given to those who face the greatest social, economic, and health challenges.

Active recipients of nutrition services must complete these forms annually. However, if a client's condition changes significantly after the completion of this form, the form can be filled out again at any time. Such changes might include a change in living situation, loss of income, loss of a spouse, family member, or caregiver, or change in health status due to accident or illness (DOEA, 2020).

701C forms, which are used to apply for congregate meals, must be completed at a congregate meal site. 701A forms, which are used to apply for home-delivered meals, must also be completed in person. Copies of these forms can be found at the following link: [Forms | Elder Affairs Florida](#).

Conclusion

Congregate and home-delivered meals provide an invaluable resource to older adults who struggle to shop for and make their own food. If you think that you or a loved one could benefit from the provision of this service, contact the Elder Helpline at 1-800-96-ELDER (1-800-963-5337) for more support. The helpline may have a wait time, so it is important to be patient. Once connected, the Elder Helpline helps you access and begin the application process for meal services through your local service provider.

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