MARC Aging and Adult Services — Home Delivered Meals Fact Sheet

Background:

MARC’s Department of Aging and Adult Services is the Area Agency on Aging for Cass, Clay, Jackson, Platte and Ray counties in Missouri. Combined, these counties have about 150,000 residents age 65 or older. We contract with vendors to provide home-delivered meals to 2,500 homebound older adults and people with disabilities. We also work with 17 senior centers to provide congregate meals for an average of 630 people each weekday.

We work with dietitians to ensure that the quality, nutritional value and portion size of meals meets clients’ needs.

Funding for meals comes from state and federal funding as well as contributions from meal recipients. State and federal funding has remained essentially flat since 2009, while the need for meals has grown significantly. MARC is reimbursed by the state, and the money is passed through directly to contractors who prepare and deliver the meals.

What has changed:

For years, MARC contracted for daily delivery of hot meals to participating residents. In certain areas, this delivery method had significant limitations:

- Hot meals could only be delivered to people within a reasonable distance from a senior center. People outside those boundaries were ineligible.
- The average cost per meal on routes without volunteer drivers was over $8. Available funds did not meet the need in our service area, and we maintained waiting lists.
- In some cases, transportation costs nearly doubled the cost of each meal.

In 2017, the Commission on Aging and MARC Board of Directors approved a new delivery method that allows us to serve more residents over a broader geography.

- This change allows us to serve eligible people throughout all five counties, regardless of senior center location, bringing us into compliance with state and federal regulations.
- Participants receive a meal pack each week with five complete meals, including frozen entrées, side dishes, bread, milk and juice.
- Meal recipients have more choices. In most areas, they can choose from nine meal pack options, including Homestyle Comfort, Classic Cuisine, All American, Country Favorites, Texas Blue Plate, Latin Flavors, Neighborhood Recipes, Rise and Shine (breakfast) and Vegetarian Delight.
- Weekly delivery cuts transportation costs significantly, allowing more meals to go to more people. The average cost per meals included in the changes is now $5.62, allowing us to serve more residents, and nearly half of the previous cost in some cases. The waiting list (164 people as of September 2017) will be eliminated.
For clients on Medicaid, there is a dollar limit for reimbursement of $5.16 per meal. Under the old system, MARC was only able to serve a fraction of Medicaid-eligible clients, because of the high cost of delivery. Under the new system, 490 Medicaid clients will receive weekly frozen meal packs.

Not everyone in our service area will see a change.

- Four senior centers (Don Bosco, Guadalupe, Vesper and Harrisonville) have their own kitchens and volunteers. Because their cost per meal is reasonable, these centers can continue to deliver hot, daily meals as they have always done. These centers currently deliver meals to 513 clients.

- Four additional centers (Shepherd’s Center, Platte County, Oak Grove and Community Assistance Council based out of Booth Manor) have volunteer driver networks, so meals can be delivered with no transportation costs. These centers currently deliver meals to approximately 150 clients, who have been given the option to continue with the daily delivery of hot meals or switch to the weekly frozen meal packs. To date, 50 percent have opted for the frozen meal packs.

- In some cases, clients have cognitive or functional disabilities that make it impossible for them to heat the frozen meals on their own. These individuals are evaluated on a case-by-case basis (by MARC and the contractor) and customized plans developed to meet their needs.

**Issues and resolution:**

Most clients are adapting well to the new system, and those who we couldn’t serve before due to location or lack of funds are especially grateful. However, some clients have expressed concerns about the new system. People often have strong preferences about food, and they do not hesitate to contact our office, public officials or the media if they are unhappy. We welcome clients’ comments and are committed to addressing any problems quickly and diligently.

We work closely with our vendors to ensure that high-quality, nutritious and tasty meals are available, and regularly update menus.

If centers have volunteer drivers, they can continue to deliver hot meals to existing clients in their service areas. If we have no transportation costs, we can stay within budget. The drivers may have to pick up meals in a different location. We are hoping that the capacity of volunteer networks will greatly increase in the future.

We are confident that the benefits of the new system outweigh the concerns. Beginning in October, we will be able to serve all individuals on the current waitlist. Many of these individuals are at risk of malnutrition or hospitalization, and they could not be served under the old program.