

Long-Term Care Menu and Mealtime Planning: Guide to Enhancing Resident and Family Partnerships

Developed by Ontario Seniors Nutrition & Advocacy Committee (OSNAC) in collaboration with Ontario Association of Residents' Councils (OARC) and Family Councils Ontario (FCO)
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Food and mealtime interactions are an important part of every resident's day. Pleasurable dining and menu enjoyment— including the food on the plate, the tastes, sounds, smells, and overall atmosphere— can have a direct impact on a resident's quality of life, social and physical well-being. Prioritizing ways for residents to influence their menu choices and dining experience can help to promote increased autonomy, positively contribute to meal satisfaction and has the potential to improve nutrition outcomes. Ongoing collaboration between the interdisciplinary team and Residents' and Family Councils is an essential part of this process. This document contains some tangible strategies and suggestions to help you review current practices, interpret legislation related to menu-planning, and enhance engagement with Residents' and Family Councils to deliver a menu and mealtime experience that is feasible to produce and optimizes satisfaction and outcomes for everyone involved:

Evaluate your current process

- How are you currently meeting with residents and families at your LTC home to discuss menu options, new items, recipe ideas etc.? Do you have a formalized process to provide updates to the Residents' Council and Family Council* (if applicable)?
- Do you ask residents and family care partners/caregivers what is working well and what areas of meal and snack service could be enhanced? Beyond your home's annual satisfaction survey, which ways are you seeking feedback about food/dining?
- Consider ways your team could enhance communication with Councils. Do you provide updates on process changes, new initiatives and challenges faced? Enhancing knowledge can often lead to a better understanding of issues. Understanding the "why" of an issue can help residents and families put things in perspective. They can then collaborate with the team to brainstorm new and sustainable menu changes.
- Explore ways that residents can influence their dining experience. Are there opportunities for residents to give feedback on the dining room itself including tables/chairs, soft furnishings like tablecloths or window treatments etc.? Would residents like to trial music in the dining room? Have flowers on the table? Remember this is the residents' home and these small details might help to stimulate appetites/improve intake. Wherever possible, be sure to "Ask a resident!" and work to find a balance between IPAC, regulations and resident preferences.
- Review how team members (including care staff) are trained to support and serve meals. Taking the time to verbally describe meal options and share 'show plates' can help residents get excited to enjoy a meal. Everyone plays a role when it comes to promoting a calm dining atmosphere. Be mindful not to use raised tones, speak across the dining room or deliver any care/treatments in this communal space.
- Residents are sensitive to words and labels you use, so it is important to embrace person-centered language in the dining rooms. Please call residents by name as opposed to their texture-type ("He's a Puree!") or by their assistance level ("She's a feeder"). Residents wear clothing protectors, not bibs!

*Note: While every LTC home is mandated to have a Residents' Council, not every home has a Family Council. In the absence of a Family Council, explore alternative ways to invite family/caregiver feedback through care conferences and ongoing conversations.

The menu is approved for nutrition adequacy along with considering residents' preferences. What are some ideas for seeking menu feedback from residents and families?

- Promote open communication with your Councils. Guests may attend Residents' and Family Council meetings by invitation only. When there are important updates or opportunities to collect feedback from residents and family care partners, consider approaching Residents' and Family Council representatives in advance of their scheduled meetings in order to be added to their meeting Agendas.
- Proactively speak with residents and families during meal rounds and when completing dining room audits. Encourage all members of the interdisciplinary team to discuss meal service, pleasurable dining, and food choices with residents during rounds. Develop a process for feedback to be sent to the food service team as deemed appropriate
- Formally evaluate the satisfaction of the menus through surveys and product testing.
- Try out new items as a theme or holiday meal and seek feedback. Discuss theme and holiday meal ideas with your Councils. For example, consider dedicating one meal every 3 weeks to trying a new item or testing out a new recipe. Collaborate with your Recreation team to plan and execute the celebration/event.
- Consider arranging, in advance, for the cook to attend a Residents' Council meeting to discuss recipe ideas. Encourage residents to share a family recipe or favourite recipe to be considered for upcoming menu cycles or events.
- Organize taste testing events for residents and evaluate the product enjoyment.
- Empower food service workers, and other staff as applicable, to share feedback with the team. Create opportunities for them to share what residents are expressing in their resident home areas.
- A separate Food Committee (often a sub-committee of Residents' Council) allows for more fulsome discussion about food/dining on an ongoing (ideally monthly) basis. Bring this opportunity forward to current Resident Leaders and seek their ideas for structuring meetings. During periods of outbreaks/cohorting, food discussions can be held on every home area for continuity.
- Explore the idea of having Resident Leaders acting as Dining Room Ambassadors who can assist with talking to residents about their meal satisfaction and sharing feedback with the leadership team. Co-design comment cards to capture observations/feedback.
- While not a legislated requirement for Family Council, having a dialogue about mealtime, with family care partners/caregivers who often spend time in dining rooms with loved ones, can further contribute to menu enhancements and quality improvements.

Prior to being in effect, each menu cycle, is reviewed by the Residents' Council for the home. What should this involve?

- Residents should have the opportunity to review and ask questions about the menu prior to cycle changes.
- Circulating copies of the menu in advance to Council members (in large font as necessary) and having a food service representative invited to attend the next scheduled Council meeting is a good way to generate discussion and document this step has taken place.

- Highlight new food/beverage items, exciting recipe changes or new initiatives that will be occurring to recognize and celebrate what is different about the upcoming menu cycle.
- Work with the Recreation department to meet with focus groups or attend larger group programs to seek menu feedback and discuss upcoming changes.
- Residents' Councils are required to formally review the menu prior to implementation. Minutes from that meeting(s) should be attached to the menu approval tool utilized.

What are some ways long-term care homes could enhance transparency with their Councils?

- Many times, our wants and needs vary, and it can be difficult to satisfy both, especially with other external factors and legislation affecting menu planning.
- When residents and families are given the opportunity to understand some of the barriers to making menu adjustments, changing menu styles and/or sourcing certain items it can help them understand that the home is not just saying “no” for convenience.
- The changes to menu planning regulations allow for more flexibility on the menu where feasible. Initiate discussions with your Councils to explore whether menu style changes, time changes etc. is something they are interested in and discuss together what could be achieved with planning, budgeting etc. Homes may not need to adjust their menu style to enhance satisfaction. The flexibility is now available should homes and Councils decide a menu style change would enhance meal satisfaction and food quality.
- Consider offering a kitchen tour to small groups of residents and/or families (or consider a virtual tour), outside of production hours. This helps to better understand the flow of food service, equipment used and can also generate discussion about why certain challenges may arise.
- Be sure to celebrate your successes and quality improvements, especially examples where resident and family feedback have contributed to outcomes. Consider posting these in a conspicuous part of the home or include in your home's resident newsletter.
- Incorporate residents in Nutrition Month and other recognition days and use this as an opportunity for residents to get to know their Dietary team members (post pictures, bios).

What is considered a permanent menu change that requires Residents' Council approval?

- Changing the times at which any of the meals are served
- Changing the menu style for any meal. For example, moving from a 2-choice menu to an a la carte style service, changing to a continental style breakfast, etc.
- Introduction of a new menu cycle. For example, a new 3-week menu rotation.