



Regulatory Bulletin

Meal requirements

RB 2026-2

Registered providers delivering meals, snacks or drinks in home or community settings must comply with meal requirements.

The meal requirements are a condition of registration under the *Aged Care Act 2024* and the *Aged Care Rules 2025*. They apply to providers registered in Category 1 (Home and community services) and Category 4 (Personal and care support in the home or community).

This bulletin describes the meal requirements. It explains how we monitor and regulate providers who need to comply with meal requirements.

You should also read:

- the Department of Health, Disability and Ageing's [detailed guidance](#) on meal requirements
- [RB 2025-01: Associated providers](#), if you use associated providers to deliver meal services.

Key points

- The meal requirements are a condition of registration (in categories 1 and 4) for providers delivering meals, snacks or drinks to individuals in home and community settings. They apply to service types:
 - meals
 - home or community general respite
 - community cottage respite (meal services).
- The meal requirements are:
 - any meals, snacks and drinks provided to individuals must be nutritious and appetising, having regard to the individual's needs and preferences
 - providers must, at least annually, have a dietitian assess the meals, snacks and drinks provided to make sure they are appetising, appropriate for older people's nutritional needs, and reflect evidence-based guidelines and practice
 - providers must implement a quality assurance framework to continuously improve the meals, snacks and drinks provided to individuals



- Registered providers are responsible for meeting these requirements, even if the meal services are delivered by a subcontractor or third party (also known as an associated provider) on their behalf.
- All providers must also make sure that their delivery of meal services upholds older persons' rights under the [Statement of Rights](#), and meet all requirements of the [Aged Care Code of Conduct](#).

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Meal requirements

Who needs to comply with the meal requirements?

The meal requirements are conditions of registration that apply to providers who deliver meals, snacks and drinks to an individual's home or provide them as part of community, centre-based or cottage respite services. For the purposes of this bulletin, we refer to these collectively as 'meal services.'

Specifically, the meal requirements apply to any provider registered in categories 1 or 4 that delivers any of the following services:

- **Meal delivery**, which covers the preparation, packaging and delivery of pre-prepared meals, but does not include the delivery of 'takeaway' food.
- **Community and centre-based respite**, which covers outings or structured group activities in a community. Note that the meal requirements do not apply to meals, snacks or drinks provided by an external location as a part of these outings/activities.
- **Community cottage respite**, which covers overnight care for an individual in a cottage-style respite facility in a community setting.

The meal requirements apply to:

- all the ways you serve food or drink. For example, delivery to the door, table service or self-serve snacks in communal areas.
- providers who produce meals in-house (i.e. through kitchens), subcontract meal preparation, or use a combination of both.

What are meal services?

'Meals, snacks and drinks' are the food and/or drinks provided to individuals as part of a funded aged care service. The food may include main meals (breakfast, lunch, dinner), multi-course meals (such as those including lighter meals and/or desserts), drinks, mid-meals or snacks, and fresh, frozen, hot or chilled meals.

The meal requirements do not apply to:

- meal preparation in an individual's home
- meal cooking kits
- nutritional products recommended for clinical/medical purposes such as oral nutrition supplements, thickeners, enteral nutrition formula and equipment.



What are the meal requirements?

There are 3 key meal requirements providers must comply with when they provide meal services:

- The food must be nutritious, appetising and consider the person's needs and preferences.
- The provider must, at least annually, have a dietitian assess their meal services to make sure that the food and drinks provided are appetising, appropriate for the needs of older people, and align with evidence-based guidelines and practice.
- The provider must implement a quality assurance framework to continuously improve their meal services, including by taking into account feedback from individuals, and any recommendations made by the dietitian in their assessment.

What is 'nutritious'?

Providers must make sure that food and drink provide essential nutrients, such as vitamins, minerals, carbohydrates, proteins, fats and fibre, which are essential for supporting bodily functions and maintaining health.

An individual's daily intake may vary, and the provider's meal service may not be the sole source of their food and drink. However, it should contribute appropriately to their nutritional needs.

Providers must be able to show that they understand the nutritional value of their meal services and have a robust rationale for why the nutritional profile of the food and drink they are providing is appropriate for the people they provide meal services to.

Food during outings

Prydwen Respite Care (PRC) is a provider registered in Category 4 (Personal and Care support in the home or community) to deliver community cottage respite.

PRC regularly runs outings to the local park for a picnic lunch. As PRC is supplying the food that people will be eating, this is considered a part of their meal service, and they are therefore responsible for meeting the meal requirements. They also need to make sure that the food and drink they provide for the outings complies with Food Safety requirements.

PRC also takes individuals on ad hoc outings at their request, such as to the beach or zoo. On these outings, people are responsible for purchasing their own meals, drinks and snacks. As these meals, drinks and snacks are not part of PRC's meal service, they are not subject the meal requirements on these occasions.

What is 'appetising'?

This means having an appealing aroma, appearance and taste. Providers do not have to cater for every person's individual dislikes, however they should offer food and drinks that are varied, flavourful and appealing, which may be based on individual feedback and a dietitian's assessment.



What does it mean to have regard to the individual's needs and preferences?

This means providers must consider the nutritional needs of older people as a cohort, such as higher protein and calcium requirements for older people. It also means taking into account any specialised dietary needs (such as medical, cultural or religious dietary requirements) of individuals receiving their meal service.

Providers should also be actively seeking feedback and information on the preferences of individuals, including through the quality assurance framework discussed below.

Providers must clearly communicate and accurately represent their service offerings prior to an individual signing into an agreement. This assists individuals in selecting the right meal service for their needs and that may best support their preferences.

To demonstrate compliance with this requirement, providers should be able to show how the nutritional needs of older people have been considered and addressed in their service offering. Providers should also demonstrate understanding any specialised requirements of individuals receiving their meal services and make available suitable menu options.

However, providers are not required to develop bespoke meals, snacks and drinks to suit every individual need and preference. Providers should also be able to show that they have considered feedback they have received on whether the food and drink provided is appetising when designing their meal service. Providers should also be able to demonstrate how they are seeking, monitoring and responding to feedback received from individuals, as well as any recommendations made by the dietitian in their assessments to improve their offerings.

Needs and preferences

Mystic Pines Care (MPC) is delivering meals to Mary, a strict vegetarian for religious reasons. MPC's usual meal supplier, Ken's Meals, informs MPC that they can no longer cater for vegetarian meals.

MPC contacts Mary to discuss options. Mary advises that she wants to use her Support at Home funds to source vegetarian meals from a local takeaway shop. MPC informs Mary that takeaway food is not funded, and discusses alternative options such as finding another meal supplier who can supply vegetarian meals. Mary agrees to work with MPC to find an alternative source of meals.

MPC finds another meal supplier, VeggieFoods, who can provide frozen vegetarian meals on a fortnightly basis to Mary. MPC makes sure the VeggieFoods menu has a dietitian assessment before signing onto an agreement.

As part of their Quality Assurance Framework, MPC regularly check-in with Mary to make sure the vegetarian meals are meeting her needs and preferences, as well as with VeggieFoods to make sure a dietitian assessment of their menu occurs at least annually. Although not a direct requirement of the meal requirements, MPC also implement a wider plan for continuous improvement to make sure they are meeting the specific needs, including cultural, religious or medical needs, of individuals under their care.



What should the annual menu assessment include?

Meals, snacks or drinks prepared by the provider, or sourced from third parties, must be assessed by a dietitian credentialled by Dietitians Australia (an Accredited Practising Dietitian, or 'APD') at least annually. The dietitian can be an existing staff member who holds APD accreditation, if available. The meal services a provider offers must be assessed by a dietitian to make sure they are appetising, appropriate for the nutritional needs of older people (including any medical, religious or cultural needs), and reflect evidence-based guidelines and practices.

When engaging an APD to undertake their assessment, the provider should supply all necessary information the APD requires, such as menus, recipes, feedback, photos and videos.

There is no particular tool, framework or method required to be used for the dietitian assessment; the dietitian and provider can determine this based on the specific needs and circumstances of the meal service provided. 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 assessment should follow evidence-based guidelines and include:

- nutritional evaluation and how the meal service adequately supports the needs of older people in general, or older people with specific dietary needs, taking into account portion sizes, accompanying food or drink (for multi-course or combination meals) and the population catered for
- the variety of meals, snacks and drinks available at any one time
- whether common dietary requirements (such as vegetarianism or food allergies) are appropriately catered for and preferences supported
- feedback from individuals, including their satisfaction with the meal service they receive
- the methods of food preparation and presentation used by the provider; and
- where texture-modified foods and thickened fluids are catered for, suitability of options and compliance with modification standards.

Nutritional assessments for individuals receiving meal services are out of scope of the meal requirements. However, the dietitian assessment should be conducted in light of the nutritional needs of the cohort the registered provider delivers their meal service to.

To demonstrate compliance with this requirement providers should keep records of the dietitian assessment, including the details of the dietitian that conducted the assessment, the methodology, findings and recommendations made to the provider and actions to improve.



What is a quality assurance framework?

Providers must develop a quality assurance framework to monitor and continuously improve the meals, snacks and drinks they and their associated providers deliver. This is a separate requirement to the condition that all registered providers continuously improve toward the delivery of high-quality care.

A provider has discretion to develop an appropriate framework that suits their circumstances and service delivery model, including by incorporating it into their existing quality assurance framework.

The framework must take into account the satisfaction of individuals with the meals, snacks and drinks they receive, and any dietitian assessments and recommendations.

Dietitians will provide information to the provider to support them to make improvements to their meal service.

The framework should be sufficiently detailed to track feedback, recommendations and other information on the quality of meal services in relation to taste, appearance, nutrition, serving size, suitability for the cohort served, choice, variety and compliance with texture modification frameworks and other nutritional claims, such as allergen free or gluten free (if relevant).

Elements of a quality assurance framework may include developing clearly defined action plans following menu reviews, conducting regular meal audits, and/or analysing satisfaction surveys, feedback and other data to inform training of staff.

To demonstrate compliance with this requirement, a registered provider should be able to produce records of their quality assurance framework and explain how it integrates feedback from individuals. These records should include information about individuals' satisfaction with the meal service and dietitian recommendations.

If applicable, the records should also include guidance from other health professionals (such as a speech pathologists on food textures) to ensure the adequacy and suitability of the meal service, and any other relevant information to set clear continuous improvement priorities.

The provider should also be able to demonstrate how these priorities are actioned and implemented at the point of service-delivery.

Additional requirements

All registered providers must have practices in place to make sure they act compatibly with the Statement of Rights – this includes in the provision of meal services. Relevant rights include, but are not limited to:

- the right to exercise choice and make decisions about the services the individual is accessing
- the right to services being delivered in a way that is culturally safe and accessible
- the right to express opinions about the services they access, and for those opinions to be heard
- the right to make complaints and to open communication when issues arise

All registered providers must also comply with the Aged Care Code of Conduct (Code) and must make sure all their aged care workers also comply with the Code. Among other things, the Code requires providers and workers to:

- act in a way that treats older people with dignity and respect, and values their diversity
- deliver services in a safe and competent manner, with care and skills
- promptly take steps to raise and act on concerns about matters that may impact the quality and safety of their services



In addition to requirements on all registered providers, Standards 1-4 of the (Quality Standards) apply to providers delivering community, centre-based or cottage respite. Standards 1-4 include requirements relating to delivering person-centred care, implementing systems to partner with individuals and continuously improve services, and assessing, planning, delivering and communicating about services.

Providers registered in categories 4, 5 or 6 must read and understand their obligations under the [Aged Care Quality Standards](#).

Registered providers that deliver meal services may also need to meet food safety and labelling requirements. For support and advice on legislative requirements under the Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code, contact your local food authority. For a list of local food authorities, please visit the [FSANZ website](#).

Associated providers

Registered providers are responsible for the quality, safety and compliance of any services they are funded for. **There are no exceptions to this rule.**

Some registered providers may use associated providers as part of their service delivery model. Associated providers are any organisation that delivers funded aged care services on behalf of the registered provider.

A registered provider needs to make sure they have processes to effectively oversee the services the associated provider delivers. This includes if a registered provider uses an associated provider to source or deliver meals, snacks or drinks. For example, when entering an agreement with an associated provider, both the registered provider and associated provider should determine and agree upon when and where the menu assessment occurs, who will lead the process, and how it will be documented.

Registered providers may implement a range of strategies to oversee the services delivered by their associated providers. These strategies should be tailored to a provider's specific circumstances, but might include:

- seeking feedback from individuals about the quality of the meal services being delivered by the associated provider
- undertaking regular, proactive reviews of the associated provider's practices to make sure they comply with the registered provider's obligations
- establishing reporting or notification requirements through contractual arrangements

Registered providers have other obligations when delivering services through associated providers. For more information about associated providers and related obligations, refer to [RB 2025-01: Associated providers](#).

Regulating compliance

The Commission monitors compliance with meal requirements to make sure individuals have access to nutritious, appetising meal services that have regard to their needs and preferences.

We receive regulatory intelligence (information) from different sources, including:

- complaints
- feedback
- incident reporting
- quality indicators
- other sources.

This information helps us build risk profiles for providers so we can tell which providers need more supervision and which providers do not, because they are doing the right thing.



If we identify risks or possible non-compliance, we work with the provider to understand:

- what is causing these issues
- what effects they could be having.

This usually involves collecting more information remotely (online from a computer) or onsite.

Our regulatory response depends on:

- the nature of the risk to older people
- how willing and able the provider is to manage the risk themselves.

If they are managing the risk well and can show their ongoing commitment to meeting their responsibilities, we support them to improve and manage risk through access to:

- resources
- support programs
- education.

If they are repeatedly or wilfully non-compliant or putting older people at risk, we will require them to change their behaviour.

We also audit providers against the Quality Standards as a part of the registration and renewal processes.

Working with associated providers

Mystic Pines Care (MPC) is registered in Category 4 (personal and care support in the home or community) to deliver home or community general respite.

MPC engages Ken's Meals to provide meals to their respite recipients on their behalf. Ken's Meals is not registered as an aged care provider in any category.

Ken's Meals, as an organisation engaged to deliver a funded aged care service on behalf of the registered provider, is an associated provider of MPC.

Although Ken's Meals are preparing, cooking and delivering the meals, it is MPC's responsibility as the registered provider to make sure Ken's Meals meet the meal requirements.

Prior to entering an arrangement, MPC and Ken's Meals decide MPC will organise the dietitian assessment for Ken's Meals. The dietitian assesses Ken's Meals menu and provides recommendations for improvements.

As part of the agreement, Ken's Meals provides regular updates on quality improvement activities undertaken to align with the dietitian recommendations that MPC can document in their Quality Assurance Framework. MPC also provide regular feedback to Ken's Meals about their offerings and documents this process.



Resources and support

The Commission has developed resources to support you to deliver quality and enjoyable food and dining experiences for people receiving aged care.

Our [Food, Nutrition and Dining page](#) for providers has factsheets, posters and webinars on:

- choice
- dementia
- the dining experience
- eating, drinking and swallowing difficulties
- oral health

We also have a suite of online training modules for aged care workers. These are available for free on our online training platform, Alis. Workers can do these modules to improve their knowledge and understanding of key issues in food, nutrition and dining.

We also publish a monthly *Food for Thought* article in our [Quality Bulletin](#). These articles:

- feature key food, nutrition and dining information
- celebrate provider successes and positive stories.

We also have a [Food, Nutrition and Dining hotline](#). Providers and workers can call the hotline to speak with professionals about issues, ideas or concerns you have about providing an enjoyable food, nutrition and dining experience.

People receiving aged care and their supporters can call the hotline to ask questions, get support and raise concerns or complaints about their food, nutrition and dining experience in aged care.

People receiving aged care and their representatives can call the hotline to speak with professionals to ask questions, seek support and raise concerns or complaints about their food, nutrition and dining experience in aged care.

The **Food, Nutrition and Dining Hotline** is available on **1800 844 044**, 9.00am to 5.00pm, Monday to Friday. You can also contact us by emailing info@agedcarequality.gov.au

If you need more help applying the meal requirements to your specific model of delivering services, you can contact the Department of Health, Disability and Aged Care at qualityagedcare@health.gov.au

The Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission acknowledges the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia, and their continuing connection to land, sea and community. We pay our respects to them and their cultures, and to Elders both past and present.

