

Tri-County Office on Aging

A Consortium of Clinton, Eaton, and Ingham Counties; and
the Cities of Lansing and East Lansing since 1974

Meals on Wheels

Home Delivered Meals

Volunteer Information and Training Manual

Revised June 2025



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At any time if you have questions, please contact us at

1-888-224-3030

Greater Lansing – Option 1

Clinton County – Option 2

Eaton County – Option 3

Rural Ingham County – Option 4

Nutrition Director – Option 6

Welcome to the Meals on Wheels Program

This manual is designed to make your volunteering experience enjoyable by giving you an overview of the program and some specific guidance regarding forms, program requirements, and emergency procedures.

Delivering meals to older adults can be a rich and rewarding experience. You will be providing a valuable service that will bring you in contact with a wide variety of unique individuals. On behalf of our organization and the individuals we serve, we thank you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Carl Buonodono".

Carl Buonodono, Nutrition Director

OUR MISSION

“To promote and preserve the independence and dignity of the aging population.”

The Meals on Wheels program provides nutritious meals for people who are unable to obtain or prepare food. This benefits those we serve in the following ways:

- Older or handicapped people may maintain their dignity while being able to stay in their own homes.
- Isolated people receive friendly visits.
- Volunteers communicate needs expressed by participants to the Meals on Wheels staff.
- Volunteers communicate circumstances that may require outside service to the Meals on Wheels office.

Meals on Wheels promote the independence and dignity of life for recipients. In these cases, the individual recipient, his or her family, and the community may realize considerable benefits.

Anyone can refer a potential participant to the program, but all individuals must meet program criteria to be offered services. An assessment is conducted on all referrals.

It must be recognized that some people who may seem like good candidates for Meals on Wheels do not qualify for this service. The person conducting the assessment is responsible for determining eligibility based on standards provided by the ACLS

Eligibility

Participants must be 60 years of age or older.

Participant must be homebound, i.e., normally is unable to leave the home unassisted, and for whom leaving takes considerable and taxing effort.

A person may leave home for medical treatment or short, infrequent absences, such as a trip to the barber or to attend religious services.

Participants must be unable to participate in the congregate meal nutrition program because of physical, mental, or emotional difficulties, such as:

- i. A disabling condition, such as limited physical mobility, cognitive or psychological impairment,
- ii. Lack of knowledge or skill to select and prepare nourishing and well-balanced meals,
- iii. Lack of means to obtain or prepare nourishing meals,
- iv. Lack of incentive to prepare and eat a meal alone, or
- v. Lack of an informal support system, has no family, friends, neighbors or others who are both willing and able to perform the service(s) needed, or the informal support system needs to be supplemented.

The person's special dietary needs can be appropriately met by the program, as defined by the most current edition of the USDA Dietary Guidelines for Americans.

Participants must be able to feed him/herself.

Participants must agree to be home when meals are delivered, to contact the program when absences are unavoidable, and to work with the program staff if participating in both HDM and congregate programs

Extended Eligibility

An individual, between the ages of 18-59, living with a disability who resides in a non-institutional household with a person who is an HDM participant may receive a meal.

A spouse, or other individual 18 or older, living full-time in the home may receive a meal if the HDM assessment finds that it is in the best interest of the HDM eligible person.

An unpaid caregiver 18 or older may receive a meal if the HDM assessment finds that it is in the best interest of the HDM-eligible person.

WHAT KIND OF MEALS ARE AVAILABLE

Once the eligibility of the person referred has been verified, a trained staff member conducts an assessment to determine how many meal options are available to the participant. Participants may receive up to 3 meal plans per day.

Participants may choose from the following meal options:

- ❖ Hot meals which include a hot food tray delivered on weekdays. Participants may request optional meals, providing an alternative entrée which is posted on the menu.
 - A “Regular Box” is delivered once per week which contains the grains, fruits and dairy meal components for the week to make the meals complete.
 - Frozen meals are available for weekends for those who qualify for 7-meals per week
- ❖ Cold meals include a lighter meal such as a sandwich as the main meal component with additional fruits, grains, vegetables, and dairy to make a complete meal. These meals are typically delivered once per week
- ❖ Frozen meal boxes contain a variety of frozen entrées and two sides along with additional fruits, grains, and dairy to make a complete meal. These meals are typically delivered once per week
- ❖ Mechanical/Texture modified meal plans are available such as ground meat, chopped/soft food, or puree
- ❖ All meal plans are healthy, well balanced, and approved by a Registered Dietician

YOUR ROLE

Delivering meals to individuals in their homes plays a critical role in ensuring the community's well-being and safety. For some participants, you may be their only human contact for the day, making your role vital in checking on their welfare.

As part of Meals on Wheels' policy, it is essential that you see the participant or their representative when delivering a meal. This ensures both the delivery of the meal and a quick verification of their well-being.

- **Providing human contact is as valuable as delivering a healthy meal!**
Take a moment to engage with the recipient. A short conversation can brighten their day and provide meaningful connection.
- **Report untouched meals.**
If you notice an accumulation of untouched meals in the home, promptly inform the Meals on Wheels office staff. This helps us address any underlying issues and ensure the participants' needs are met.

Approaching Participants with Care and Consideration

- **Treat each person as an individual.**
Avoid assumptions based on age or stereotypes (e.g., not all older adults are grandparents).
- **Show respect in all interactions.**
Speak to participants as equals and avoid condescension.
- **Exercise patience.**
Some participants may need extra time to answer the door or respond.
- **Be mindful of verbal and non-verbal communication.**
Your tone, gestures, and expressions matter and can greatly influence how the participant feels.
- **Consider physiological changes.**
Keep in mind that some participants may have hearing difficulties or other physical limitations.
- **Stay alert to emotional or behavioral changes.**
If a participant seems upset, withdrawn, or is losing their appetite, contact your Meals on Wheels program to report your concerns.
- **Maintain confidentiality.**
Do not share personal information about participants or volunteers. Direct all inquiries to the Meals on Wheels program.

CONFIDENTIALITY/HIPAA

Confidentiality and Privacy Policy for Meals on Wheels Volunteers

As of April 14, 2003, the federally mandated **Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA)** has been in effect. Under HIPAA, TCOA holds a legal and ethical responsibility to safeguard the privacy and security of participants' **Protected Health Information (PHI)**. To meet these requirements, TCOA maintains privacy policies and procedures and ensures that staff and volunteers are trained to protect participant health information.

While Meals on Wheels volunteers are only given limited participant information necessary for their routes, they may occasionally witness medical conditions or receive personal disclosures from participants. It is imperative that all such information is treated as confidential.

Volunteer Responsibilities:

1. Maintain Confidentiality:

- All information or knowledge gained through contact with participants must remain confidential.
- Do not use names, addresses, or other identifying details when discussing your volunteer work.

2. Secure Document Handling:

- Place route sheets upside down and store them at the bottom of the blue bag, if possible.
- Keep all delivery documents secure and return them promptly to the designated pickup location.

3. Reporting Concerns:

- Report any medical concerns or emergencies to the Meals on Wheels office.
- For urgent situations, call **911** immediately.

By following these guidelines, you help ensure the privacy, dignity, and well-being of all program participants.

Identifying Participant Needs

While the majority of challenges encountered by Meals on Wheels drivers are not medical emergencies, many participants face difficulties due to decreased financial resources and physical capabilities. These issues can hinder their ability to manage daily tasks or maintain their well-being. Volunteers play a vital role in identifying these needs and notifying the Meals on Wheels staff, thereby enhancing the capacity to serve the older adult population effectively.

Common Challenges Faced by Participants:

1. **Structural Home Damage:** Issues such as leaking roofs, inoperative furnaces, or faulty plumbing.
2. **Home Maintenance:** Inability to clean or maintain the home adequately.
3. **Uneaten Food:** Presence of untouched meals or large amounts of uneaten food.
4. **Substance Misuse:** Abuse of medication or alcohol.
5. **Financial Struggles:** Difficulty affording necessities such as food, clothing, utilities, or medicine.
6. **Emotional Health:** Severe loneliness and depression.
7. **Administrative Challenges:** Trouble managing finances, understanding insurance forms, or completing tax documents.
8. **Abuse:** Suspected abuse by a spouse or family member.
9. **Daily Tasks:** Inability to perform essential tasks like washing clothes, shopping for groceries, or shoveling snow.
10. **Personal Care:** Need for assistance with bathing, hair washing, or foot care.
11. **Incontinence:** Struggles with managing incontinence.

Reporting Identified Needs:

Services vary by location, but if you identify a participant's needs, please notify the Meals on Wheels staff. Our team will review available community resources and work to connect the participant with appropriate assistance. By observing and reporting these challenges, you help improve the quality of life for the participants we serve. Thank you for your dedication and care!

Responding to Emergency Situations

As a volunteer, you may encounter emergency situations during your route. In such cases, your greatest asset is your ability to remain calm and act promptly.

Steps to Take in Emergency Situations:

1. If the Participant is Not Home:

- Contact your Meals on Wheels Program immediately.

2. If There is an Emergency:

- Call **911** first to ensure emergency services are dispatched.
- Then, notify the Meals on Wheels staff of the situation.

Observing Changes in Participants:

As you continue your route, you'll become familiar with what is "normal" for each individual. Be attentive to gradual or sudden changes, such as:

- **Facial Coloration:** Unusual pallor or redness.
- **Speech Patterns:** Slurred or incoherent speech.
- **Ambulation:** Altered walking habits or difficulty moving.
- **Eating Habits:** Changes in meal consumption or appetite.
- **Physical Complaints:** New or worsening symptoms mentioned by the participant.

These changes may indicate underlying health issues. Many lives have been saved because alert Meals on Wheels volunteers recognized these signs and reported the need for medical attention.

Your vigilance and responsiveness play a crucial role in the safety and well-being of the participants we serve. Thank you for your dedication and care!

Importance of Record-Keeping

Accurate records are essential for the success and sustainability of Meals on Wheels programs. These records:

- Help monitor the program's overall status.
- Track supportive services provided to participants.
- Justify the program's continued existence within the community.

Volunteer Record-Keeping Responsibilities:

1. Communication:

- Use the Route Sheets provided to communicate with the Meals on Wheels staff about routine matters.
- For urgent issues that require immediate attention, report them directly on the same day.

2. Route Sheet:

- Sign your Route Sheet to confirm that all meals have been delivered as specified.
- This documentation ensures accurate records of meal delivery.
- Fill in and sign the time portion of the sheet, noting the time the first and last delivery was made.

By maintaining detailed and accurate records, you contribute to the program's accountability and effectiveness. Thank you for your attention to these important details!

Food Safety Guidelines

Proper food handling during packaging and delivery is essential to ensure both the safety and acceptability of meals. Using improper techniques could result in foodborne illnesses, which we must take every precaution to prevent.

Food Safety Control Methods:

1. Delivery Time Monitoring:

- Meals on Wheels track the time it takes to deliver meals as required by the Health Department.
- While temperature tracking is not required, monitoring delivery times ensures food safety.

2. Health Department Guidelines:

- Prepared food must be kept at a minimum temperature of **135°F** before being removed from a controlled environment (e.g., an oven or refrigerator).
- Meals are considered safe to eat if delivered within **4 hours** of removal from temperature control.
- Cold foods such as those in a frozen or cold meal box have up to 6 hours of removal from temperature control.

Volunteer Responsibilities:

1. Record Delivery Times:

- Write the time of your last delivery on your Route Sheet.
- Sign the form to confirm accurate documentation.

2. Follow Procedures:

- Adhering to County Health Department requirements protects participants' health and ensures the program maintains its license to serve meals.

By following these procedures, you play a vital role in maintaining the health and safety of the individuals we serve. Thank you for your cooperation and dedication!

Food Handling and Delivery Procedures

1. Pick Up Meal Containers

- Arrive at the designated location at the appropriate time to pick up the meal containers and route materials.
- After collecting the route, contact the office to:
 - Confirm the route has been picked up.
 - Receive any updates or changes to the route.

2. Follow Route Sheet Instructions

- Your route sheet provides essential details, including:
 - **Delivery Location:** Specific instructions (e.g., front door, side door, through the garage).
 - **Delivery Method:** Whether to knock, ring a buzzer, or follow other instructions.
 - **Meal Type:** Hot Meals, Regular Boxes, Frozen Meals, or Cold Meals.
 - **Contact Information:** Phone numbers to call participants if they do not answer the door.

3. Deliver Meals

- **Maintain Food Temperatures:**
 - Keep meals inside insulated containers until you arrive at the participant's residence.
- **Safety First:**
 - If you feel unsafe at any point during the delivery process, **do not deliver the meal**. Instead, contact the office, and alternative arrangements will be made.
- **Types of Meals:**
 - **Regular Hot Meal:** One hot tray (check for alternative options if noted).
 - **Mechanical Hot Meal:** One hot tray labeled "Mechanical."
 - **Regular Box:** This box contains grain, fruit and dairy portion for each meal that week
 - **Weekend/Holiday Frozen Meal Box:** These boxes contain 2 complete meals for weekends and holidays.

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- **Frozen Meal Box:** These boxes are labeled with the Meals on Wheels logo and contain 5 complete frozen meals
 - **Cold Meal Box:** These boxes are labeled Cold Meals, typically sandwiches, and contain 7 complete meals.

4. Participant Absences:

- If the participant is not home, you must notify the office before moving on to the next delivery.
- If the participant mentions canceling meals, ask them to contact the Meals on Wheels office directly.
- If someone else informs you the participant is not home, call the office to verify.

***NEVER LEAVE MEALS IF NO
ONE IS HOME!!***

Never put yourself in harms way! If you feel unsafe delivering to a participant, DO NOT DELIVER! Contact the office so that we can make other arrangements. Your safety is important!!

UNIVERSAL PRECAUTIONS

Universal Precautions: Protecting Against Infections

Universal precautions are a set of practices designed to protect individuals from infections by minimizing exposure to blood and other body fluids. These precautions emphasize that everyone is responsible for their own safety and for taking steps to prevent possible contact with potentially infectious materials.

In home care and hospice settings, patients may have infections caused by antibiotic-resistant microorganisms. These situations require strict adherence to protocols based on standard precautions to safeguard both staff and volunteers.

Protocols for Volunteers

1. **Implementation of Standard Precautions:** Protocols will be maintained to protect all volunteers. These include measures such as:
 - Proper hand hygiene before and after patient contact.
 - Use of personal protective equipment (PPE) as needed (e.g., gloves, masks).
 - Safe handling and disposal of potentially contaminated materials.
2. **Meals on Wheels Delivery Guidance:** Specific directions for delivering meals may be provided on the route sheet. Volunteers should follow these instructions carefully to ensure the safety of both themselves and participants.

Volunteer Responsibilities

As a volunteer, you play a critical role in preventing the spread of infections. To protect yourself and participants:

- Be alert to potential areas of infection, such as open wounds or visible signs of illness.
- Follow all hygiene and safety protocols consistently.
- Report any concerns or potential exposures to Meals on Wheels staff immediately.

By taking personal responsibility for safety and adhering to universal precautions, we can collectively minimize the risk of infection and ensure a safe environment for everyone.

PARTICIPANT DONATIONS and FUNDING

Participants may ask you questions about the meal donations. You are the person they see on a regular basis. We would like to keep you as informed as possible with respect to our policies and procedures.

Some information that may be helpful regarding our donation policy:

1. You are not allowed to accept donations. Participants are provided information on how to contribute, please refer them to the Meals on Wheels office. **DO NOT ACCEPT DONATIONS!!**
2. We do need donations to keep our meal program growing. They are a vital part of the operating budget. Each meal cost is around \$8.00
3. The suggested **donation** is currently \$4.00 per meal. This covers approximately ½ the cost of the meal. **No one is denied a meal because they are unable to contribute.**
4. We accept cash, personal checks or Bridge Card.

Many participants feel more comfortable receiving this service if they can make donations toward it.

Meals on Wheels receives funding from Federal and State Grants, Local Municipalities, Fundraising efforts such as our Annual Golf Outing and Dinner & Auction, and individual donations.

A WORD ABOUT WEATHER

This passage explains the policies regarding the cancellation of Meals on Wheels deliveries due to inclement weather. Here's a summary of the key points:

1. **Cancellation Criteria:**

- Deliveries may be canceled due to snow, drifting roads, or icy conditions.
- The program does not automatically follow school closures.

2. **Notification:**

- Closures may be announced on TV.
- Routes are closed individually based on area-specific conditions.
- Participants and drivers will be personally notified in case of cancellation.

3. **Provisions for Participants:**

- Shelf-stable food is provided for emergencies.
- New supplies are issued if routes remain closed for two or more days.

VOLUNTEER SCHEDULING

1. Scheduling Your Deliveries:

- A route coordinator or staff volunteer coordinator will contact you to schedule your delivery dates.
- Each month, the Meals on Wheels office will send you a calendar with delivery schedules for the upcoming month. This will be mailed or emailed to you and should arrive before the end of the preceding month.
- Your route coordinator will check in with you on a monthly basis to confirm your schedule.

2. If You Cannot Deliver on a Scheduled Date:

- Notify your route coordinator or staff volunteer coordinator as soon as possible.
- If you have availability on other dates, you may contact another volunteer from the calendar to trade shifts.
- If a trade is made, inform the Meals on Wheels office about the change. This ensures we know who is delivering and can reach them if needed on the delivery day.

3. Last-Minute Changes:

- If you find that you cannot deliver on the morning of, or evening before, your scheduled date, please call the Meals on Wheels office immediately.
- You can leave a message on the office voicemail any time before 8:00 AM.

4. Why Communication is Important:

- Accurate scheduling helps us ensure that meals are delivered efficiently.
- Being able to contact the correct volunteer on delivery day is crucial for addressing any unexpected issues.

Thank you for your dedication and flexibility as a Meals on Wheels volunteer! Your commitment ensures that we can provide consistent service to our community.

By signing this I am acknowledging that I received a copy of the
"Meals on Wheels Volunteer Information and Training Manual"

Volunteer Printed Name

Date

Volunteer Signature