



## Department for the Aging

### Home Delivered Meals

Concept Paper

September 22, 2023

#### Purpose and Rationale for the Concept Paper

New York City Department for the Aging’s (NYC Aging or the Department) works to ensure the dignity and quality of life of New York City’s diverse older adults. Currently, there are just over 1.7 million New Yorkers aged 60 and older, making up 20% of our city’s residents,<sup>1</sup> and the number of those aged 60 and over is projected to grow to 1.86 million by 2040.<sup>2</sup> In April 2021, NYC Aging released its Community Care Plan<sup>3</sup> to expand aging support services, centered on keeping older New Yorkers in good physical and mental health, and with a strong sense of well-being, so that they can live safely in their communities and homes and avoid, to the fullest extent possible, institutional care.

One of NYC Aging’s top strategic priorities is re-envisioning food provision for older adults to enhance quality, efficiency, and sustainability of meal services for the aging. NYC Aging’s Home Delivered Meals Program (HDM) is a vital program that achieves NYC Aging’s goals of helping older adults age in place. HDM enables older adults to remain safely in their homes in a state of well-being, serving homebound older adults who are unable to prepare meals and who lack supports who can provide meals.

It is NYC Aging’s goal to ensure that the meals provided to older adults in the HDM program are not only nutritious and meet regulatory guidelines, but also appeal to a diverse and evolving population of older New Yorkers. As the older adult population has grown and shifted demographically in composition, NYC Aging has instituted several program enhancements (to address quality, choice, and diversity) as a result of the program’s previous procurement in 2020 to better meet the needs of meal recipients. For example, contracted providers were required to offer cultural meal options to better address the food preferences of the population of older adults in their catchments. NYC Aging plans to make further progress in delivering culturally appropriate meals citywide. Several issues of food quality have also been addressed over the past few years, including offering more meal options, but NYC Aging continues to focus on improving choice, diversity, and quality as a primary goal in the HDM program.

In this concept paper, which will inform an upcoming Request for Proposals (RFP), NYC Aging presents a summary of proposed guidelines for the HDM program. We invite stakeholder reflections and input on ways to improve and enhance the services this program provides.

#### Program Background

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<sup>1</sup> NYC Department for the Aging (Nov 2021). “Annual Plan Summary, covering April 2022 – March 2023.” Accessible at: [https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/dfta/downloads/pdf/reports/APS\\_2021\\_Final\\_Draft\\_11\\_2021.pdf](https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/dfta/downloads/pdf/reports/APS_2021_Final_Draft_11_2021.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Ibid: [https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/dfta/downloads/pdf/reports/APS\\_2021\\_Final\\_Draft\\_11\\_2021.pdf](https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/dfta/downloads/pdf/reports/APS_2021_Final_Draft_11_2021.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/dfta/downloads/pdf/publications/DFTACommunityCarePublicVisionFinal040221.pdf>

NYC Aging supports older adults in their desire to continue to live at home safely and in circumstances that will allow them to continue to enjoy their lives and contribute to their neighborhoods. The provision of a meal to a frail older person helps to ensure that his or her nutritional needs are met and thereby contributes to the ability to maintain overall health and live independently in the community. As the lead Mayoral agency for this population, and the largest agency in the federal network of Area Agencies on Aging, NYC Aging promotes the development and provision of accessible services for older persons and serves as their advocate on legislative and policy issues.

NYC Aging currently contracts with 15 community-based organizations to operate the HDM program from Monday to Friday, and the network delivered 4,287,681 meals to 26,852 unduplicated homebound older adults across the five boroughs in FY22. Each contractor is responsible for delivering meals in a pre-determined geographic catchment area of the City, comprised of a group of Community Districts. In the upcoming RFP, there will be 15 competition pools, also known as catchment areas.

In order to be eligible for Home Delivered Meals as part of this program, one must be:

- A Resident of New York City;
- Age 60 or older;
- Unable to attend a congregate meal program because of an accident, illness or frailty;
- Lack formal or informal supports who can regularly provide meals;
- Able to live safely at home if meals are delivered; or
- Unable to prepare meals due to at least one of the following;
  - Lacks adequate cooking facilities;
  - Unable to safely prepare meals;
  - Unable to shop or cook; and/or
  - Lacks knowledge or skills to prepare meals.

Each HDM program is partnered with the NYC Aging Case Management Program that is associated with that same catchment area. NYC Aging's local Case Management program<sup>4</sup>. Case Management Agencies (CMA) perform in-depth assessments of social, psychological, mental, and physical well-being in order to identify client needs, and assist clients in obtaining supports to continue living independently in the community. The CMA is responsible for determining if the older person can manage the receipt of multiple meals twice a week in lieu of receiving a hot meal delivered daily, and then advising the client of the available meal types so the client can decide which option is best for them. If a client requests a home delivered meal and is eligible for the service, the CMA is responsible for performing a comprehensive intake and assessment to determine eligibility, authorizing meal delivery to the client, and sending an authorization referral to the local HDM program. The HDM program accepts the referral and begins delivering meals to the client within one-to-three business days. While the HDM program may also encounter older adults who may need home-delivered meals, the CMA is the main point of approval, and the HDM provider must refer that individual back to CMA for eligibility determination and approval of meals.

For the purposes of this concept paper, it is important to note that meals prepared for the HDM program must meet federal, state and local laws and standards, including food safety and nutrition laws and standards, which were established to ensure that meal recipients are offered nutritious and

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<sup>4</sup> [In-Home Services - NYC Aging](#)

balanced meals. Meals must meet NYC Food Standards<sup>5</sup>; and must provide one-third of the dietary reference intake (DRI)<sup>6</sup>.

### *Scope of the Problem*

NYC Aging's Community Care Plan provides unique alignment with the concept of HDM. Community Care helps older adults thrive in their homes, with stronger physical and mental health. As such, the Community Care Plan supports in-home community care services like HDM. Particularly due to the COVID pandemic, older adults have become even more susceptible to frailty, cognitive decline, loneliness and isolation, decreased mobility, and increased mental health challenges. In 2019, almost 30% of older New Yorkers were mobility and self-care impaired.<sup>5</sup> These factors are often accompanied by situations in which an older adult lives alone, has difficulty leaving the home, does not always visit doctors, and has minimal social visits. The HDM program helps mitigate some of these factors for older adults.

In releasing this concept paper and the succeeding RFP, NYC Aging remains aware of program adjustments that need to be made to reflect the changing scope of the population and economic realities such as inflation. Inflation and other financial realities such as staffing costs due to turnover from drivers and cooks, and increased prices for gas/tolls and for food from outside vendors, particularly for cultural meals, are also influencing HDM operations. NYC Aging will factor in the aforementioned elements, as well as explore alternate reimbursement structures, when calculating an appropriate rate of reimbursement

Finally, meeting the cultural needs of older adults is crucial. NYC's older adult population comprises a racially, ethnically, and culturally diverse group, reflective of New York City's cosmopolitan population. 57.6% of older adults in New York City are immigrants, and 48% of the older adults in New York City speak a language other than English as their first language.<sup>7</sup> NYC Aging and its contracted network of providers have long been committed to providing services to diverse clientele in the most culturally competent manner possible, and the concepts of diversity, choice, and quality (including Good Food Purchasing guidelines) introduced in the previous HDM program procurement reflect that commitment.

### **Stakeholder Engagement Feedback**

To develop objectives for this RFP, throughout the months of May and June 2023, NYC Aging conducted several stakeholder engagement sessions with current HDM program directors, current subcontractors, and others in the field who conduct similar meal preparation and delivery programs. Feedback from stakeholders included the following common themes:

- Providers are proud of the meal diversity and choices they offer their clients;
- Catering and vendor prices have significantly increased due to inflation, influencing programs and operations;
- Reimbursement rates based on meals delivered do not always capture the true cost of operations;

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/doh/downloads/pdf/cardio/cardio-meals-snacks-standards.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> [19\\_pi\\_26\\_nutrition\\_program\\_standards.pdf \(ny.gov\)](#)

<sup>7</sup> New York City's Department for the Aging, *Profile on Older New Yorkers*. Data Source; U.S. Census Bureau ACS 2015-2019. Accessible at [Profile of Older New Yorkers 2015-2019 updates \(2\).xlsx \(nyc.gov\)](#)

- Certain cultural and religious meals are more expensive and more difficult to provide than others, especially in the most authentic way that still meet nutritional regulations;
- There has been high turnover for drivers, and occasionally kitchen and office staff;
- There could be a tighter link between CMA programs and HDM programs, especially when it comes to conducting client outreach and CMAs making appropriate referrals to HDM.

These themes, and more, will be addressed in the upcoming RFP. NYC Aging invites readers of this concept paper to provide additional information on their HDM Program, including areas for improvement or suggested best practices, as well as feedback and insights on the potential reforms being considered, which are outlined below.

## **Concepts for the Upcoming RFP**

### *Reimbursement*

The HDM contracts will remain structured as a rate-based reimbursement model. There will be one reimbursement rate for all types of meals, and any payment to subcontractors must honor the same reimbursement rate set by NYC Aging.

It is NYC Aging's understanding that current New York State policy restricts payments for anything other than successfully delivered meals, and as a result, NYC Aging will continue to reimburse for only successfully delivered meals.

The previous RFP and resulting contracts introduced the idea of performance payments based on client satisfaction results. As this was not implemented, this will not be included in the upcoming RFP.

### *Subcontractor Usage*

It is NYC Aging's preference to reduce the amount of administrative burden by reforming use of subcontractors and caterers; the new RFP will reflect this preference. While the upcoming RFP will continue to allow for subcontracting as part of the program, engaging with multiple subcontractors can be costly and often difficult for operations and compliance. It is NYC Aging's ultimate goal to reduce the number of subcontractors and commercial caterers that serve its network, favoring instead to create more in-network infrastructure to increase the number of sites serving meals cooked by NYC Aging programs. In particular, the RFP will discourage vendors from utilizing subcontractors who then subcontract, as this often results in dilution of administrative costs and can negatively impact food quality control. The application questions for the RFP will ask potential vendors about their proposed structure for delivery of services and will give preference to those who do not use subcontractors who then subcontract.

Due to higher costs of food in general, but particularly for higher costs for some cultural and religious meals, NYC Aging is considering different approaches to assist in securing a more competitive rate for the network citywide. At this time, NYC Aging is considering two possible options to achieve this:

- 1) Introducing a citywide catchment for specialty meals that have typically been difficult to find caterers and/or have increased food costs; or
- 2) Releasing a Request for Information (RFI) along with the new HDM RFP, to help identify caterers/providers to be named on a pre-qualified list of providers willing to be a cultural

meals subcontractor at a standardized rate pre-determined by NYC Aging (similar to group purchasing). This list would be released as an addendum after the release of the RFP.

In the upcoming RFP, NYC Aging will be asking potential providers to detail how they plan to operationalize the program, particularly around the utilization of subcontractors and caterers for meal preparation and delivery.

### *Increasing Choice, Diversity, and Quality*

Choice and Diversity: As previously stated, NYC Aging feels strongly about making every effort to ensure that cultural needs of clients are met. It is crucial for the Home Delivered Meals program to continue to promote choice and diversity in the meals it offers clients. According to research done in 2020 to prepare for that RFP, 50% of clients indicated that a meal that is culturally/religiously aligned is important to them. In FY22, 25% of meals delivered reflected a cultural, ethnic, or religious preference.

In stakeholder meetings, providers noted that while they are proud of the diversity of menus the program offers, there are still some operational challenges in meeting some types of menu options. Therefore, NYC Aging will be relaxing the threshold for cultural requirements -- currently this threshold was determined if 10% of the older adults within the community district (CD) spoke a certain language; going forward, this will be relaxed to require cultural meals only if 15% of its older adult population within the CD reflects a certain language. When released, the RFP will include a detailed list of cultural needs per each CD, updated to include the latest census data.

Additionally, similarly to how NYC Aging currently requires HDM providers to offer Kosher options to all clients within each catchment, the new RFP will require providers to offer a Halal option in every catchment for clients who observe religious dietary guidelines.

Quality: As previously noted, by discouraging use of subcontractors who then subcontract, NYC Aging expects a positive impact on food quality.

Additionally, similarly to the previous RFP, where vendors were asked to be responsible for Good Food Purchasing principles,<sup>8</sup> NYC Aging would like to emphasize food quality in the new RFP. Particularly important is the focus on “good food principles,” including sustainable, high quality, locally sourced food, minimally processed foods, and plant-based and vegetarian options.

Additionally, NYC Aging recognizes that occasionally, quality and safety of food may be affected by vehicles that do not have controlled temperatures. Understanding that not all meals are delivered by vehicle, and some may be delivered through walking routes, NYC Aging would like to assuage meal quality and safety concerns. NYC Aging is considering requiring temperature-controlled vehicles (vehicles that have insulated, thermostatically controlled compartments that maintain appropriate temperatures for frozen, chilled, and hot meals, such as hot shot vans) for Home Delivered Meals providers.

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<sup>8</sup> <https://goodfoodpurchasing.org/>

### *Emergency/Holiday Meals*

In the new RFP, holiday and/or emergency meals may be included as a requirement as part of the HDM program. However, NYC Aging is still considering whether this will be a citywide catchment, if each awarded provider will be contractually obligated to offer one or both of these types of meals, or if this contract will remain separate from the HDM contract.

Holiday meals are home delivered meals specifically for 11 holidays. In stakeholder engagement discussions, potential vendors noted that holiday meals did not take much extra preparation resources and could easily be added to the HDM contract.

Emergency meals are shelf stable meals that an older adult can have on hand in the event of a major city crisis, extreme weather, or power outage. Providers and potential providers stated that as long as enough planning and notice were provided, the ability to provide emergency meals as part of the HDM contract would not be a hardship for them.

As part of responses to this concept paper, NYC Aging is requesting feedback from potential vendors about their ability to potentially provide holiday and/or emergency meals directly as part of this contract.

### *Outreach and Assessment*

During stakeholder engagement, some providers noted challenges relying on their CMA providers being the only source of referral for clients. Some must seek ways to supplement their program with their own outreach in order to meet their meal unit requirements. Although not required, NYC Aging will be encouraging providers to do their own outreach to reach more potential clients and maximize their contract, although any new clients acquired from HDM outreach would be referred back to CMA for an in-home assessment.

Understanding the symbiotic relationship between CMA and HDM, NYC Aging will review units to best align CMA and HDM capacity. Additionally, NYC Aging will work closely with both sets of providers to educate them on any reforms to the HDM program and its eligibility requirements; this includes how to better educate clients around HDM meal options and the program itself to ensure appropriate referrals.

### *Data Collection and Management*

NYC Aging contractors will continue to be required to use the data system(s) of NYC Aging's choosing for data collection and client management<sup>9</sup>.

Specifically, for the HDM program, contractors will continue to be required to track data in the Home Delivered Meals app, details of which will be found in the RFP. However, NYC Aging is in the process of upgrading its Senior Tracking, Analysis and Reporting System (STARS), and plans to embed the app into the upgraded STARS system.

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<sup>9</sup> All NYC Aging-funded contractors are currently required to adhere to NYC Aging's data collection system STARS – for the purposes of tracking and keeping client information up to date. The Department will provide all necessary user licenses for STARS, or any subsequent system once contractors have been awarded a contract.

Additionally, HDM providers will continue to participate in data collection for Good Food Purchasing Program (GFPP), particularly to measure food quality. The goal of the Good Food Purchasing Program is to provide transparency about how city agencies' food procurements impact core values relating to local economies, environmental sustainability, valued workforce, animal welfare, and nutrition.

Per NYC Executive Order 8, Commitment to Health and Nutrition: Food Standards and Good Food Purchasing, all vendors are required to provide a usage report of all food items on an annual basis with detailed information, which will be expanded upon in the RFP.

Data collection for other strategic goals related to food provision include participation in DSNY's composting program, group purchasing, particularly from local farms, and number of meals produced within the NYC Aging network.

### *Emergency Preparedness*

The contractor would engage in emergency preparedness planning and exercises and would work with NYC Aging to ensure the provision of services and continuity of care as directed by the Department in an emergency and/or crisis.

- a. The contractor must furnish the program director's contact information, including email and cell number; additionally, the contractor should have a general email address to receive emergency notifications.
- b. The contractor will complete a Service Provider Emergency Preparedness and Response Plan and update every two years. The plan should detail how the center would continue to provide critical services to clients in the event of an emergency (continuity of operations). Such emergencies include (but not limited to) the following scenarios:
  - Coastal Storms
  - Blackouts/Power Outages
  - Winter Weather
  - Heat Waves
  - Communicable Disease Outbreak/Pandemic
  - Active Shooter
  - Mass Transportation Disruptions
  - No-notice Events
- c. During a large-scale citywide emergency, NYC Aging may request Home Delivered Meal providers to assist with emergency response outside normal operating hours, such as during evenings and weekends (i.e. major hurricane event or no-notice event such as a building collapse or terrorist attack).
- d. The contractor is expected to coordinate with NYC Aging's OEPR, which offers trainings, meetings, and public/private partnerships to help service providers be better prepared for emergencies. The contractor would provide requested information (including phone numbers, data, reports, etc.) to NYC Aging related to an ongoing emergency situation preferably by the Close of Business but no later than 10:00 a.m. EST the following morning.

## **Conclusion**

Through this concept paper, NYC Aging looks forward to ideas and insights from network providers and other Home Delivered Meals stakeholders concerning how best to enhance cultural competency, expand the program's reach, and support better outcomes for clients.

## **Total Funding/Sources of Funding/Method of Payment**

NYC Aging anticipates that the total funding for the Home Delivered Meals Program will be approximately \$55,137,146 annually (or an anticipated \$165,411,438 for three years), accounting for a possible 4,314,330 units (meals) per year. NYC Aging anticipates a maximum award of 15 contracts. The unit distribution and related rate will be presented in the RFP. Funding may change at the time of the release of the RFP, depending on availability of the funds, and/or thereafter. NYC Aging anticipates utilizing a rate-based reimbursement per unit (meal). NYC Aging anticipates a rate of \$12.78 per meal.

## **Proposed Term of the Contract**

It is anticipated that the term of the contract(s) awarded from this RFP will be from July 1, 2024, through June 30, 2027. NYC Aging reserves the right to renew the contract up to three times for a period of 1 year each.

## **Anticipated Procurement Timeline**

NYC Aging is currently planning to release an RFP in Winter 2023/2024. The anticipated contract start date is July 1, 2024.

## **Use of PASSPort and Prequalification**

To respond to any Human/Client Services RFP, organizations must have an account and an Approved HHS Accelerator Prequalification status in PASSPort. Proposals and Prequalification applications will ONLY be accepted through PASSPort.

If you do not have a PASSPort account or Approved PASSPort HHS Accelerator PQL Application, please visit [nyc.gov/passport](http://nyc.gov/passport) to get started.

If you have any questions about your HHS Accelerator PQL status or for assistance with creating a PASSPort account, please contact MOCS Service Desk through the contact form [nyc.gov/mocshelp](http://nyc.gov/mocshelp).

## **Contact Information and Deadline for Responses to the Concept Paper**

Comments and questions in response to this Concept Paper are invited by no later November 6<sup>th</sup>, 2023. Please email Mary Tracy at [rfp@aging.nyc.gov](mailto:rfp@aging.nyc.gov) and write "Home Delivered Meals Concept Paper" in the subject line.