

Guidance on Soliciting the Expertise of a Registered Dietitian Nutritionist (RDN)

The Older Americans Act (OAA) requires that meal providers solicit the expertise of a dietitian or other individual with equivalent education and training in nutrition science, or if such an individual is not available, an individual with comparable expertise in the planning of nutritional services.

DARS DCL recommends that AAA and nutrition service providers hire or contract with a registered dietitian (RDN).

Credentials

Generally, a registered dietitian may not call him/herself a registered dietitian unless he/she meets the following criteria:

- Completed a minimum of a bachelor's degree at a US regionally accredited university or college and course work accredited or approved by the Accreditation Council for Education in Nutrition and Dietetics (ACEND) of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics.
- Completed an ACEND-accredited supervised practice program at a health-care facility, community agency, or a foodservice corporation or combined with undergraduate or graduate studies.
- Passed the national examination administered by the Commission on Dietetic Registration (CDR).
- Completed 75 hours continuing professional educational requirements every 5 years to maintain registration.

In addition, the RDN should have work experience or specialized training in gerontology or geriatrics, and the planning and supervision of food and nutrition services in home and community-based or facility-based settings.

Responsibilities of the RDN

The following is a non-inclusive list of responsibilities that may be expected of the RDN. The responsibilities of the RDN may vary depending on a number of considerations such as the structure of the AAA's nutrition program, including whether meals are planned and prepared onsite or contracted out.

Monitoring Kitchens: the RDN checks directly operated or subcontracted kitchens, caterers, and HDM packaging sites. The RDN reviews food and supply specifications, food quality and cost, food preparation methods, adherence to menu, use of standardized recipes and portion control, HDM and bulk food packaging, handling of leftovers, inventory and storage, temperature monitoring, compliance with the sanitary code and equipment maintenance.

Monitoring Congregate Sites: the RDN checks food services including portion control and the serving of food, checking temperatures taken by site staff, compliance with the sanitary code, condition of equipment, handling of leftovers, serving of meals, and participant satisfaction. Checks that sites with kitchens are monitored. Monitors client records and program functions such as meal records, assessments, contributions, etc.

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Monitoring Home Delivered Meal Delivery: the RDN checks food portions and temperature monitoring, meal delivery including driver techniques such as the handling of meals and carriers. Observes client condition and solicits comments on meals and service. Reviews assessment records, verifies eligibility, checks contribution procedures, etc.

Menu Planning: the RDN plans menus considering participant preferences and meal satisfaction, dietary need, dietary guidelines, food suitability, and cost. Reviews menus if other staff or contractors are responsible for planning menus.

Menu Verification: the RDN reviews menus and performs nutrient analyses or completes meal pattern worksheets to verify that meals comply with menu planning guidelines and provide nutrient content requirements and are appropriate for the program and participants. Reviews nutrient analyses or meal pattern worksheets if performed by others and verifies that meals comply with requirements.

Nutrition Education Development: the RDN develops or reviews and approves nutrition information (handouts and/or presentations) and develops an annual nutrition education plan.

Nutrition Education Presentations: the RDN provides group nutrition presentations at congregate sites. Other staff may present under the direction of the RDN. Dietetic students or interns may present under the direction of the RDN.

Nutrition Counseling: the RDN assesses individual client nutrition needs, develops and implements a counseling plan, evaluates the client's outcomes and maintains documentation. Counseling may be provided to client and/or caregiver at a congregate site, in home, office, or by phone. Contacts may be brief (taking on average one half hour) or extensive (taking on average 2 hours). The RDN may direct other appropriately trained staff, students, interns, or volunteers in client counseling.

Administration: the RDN prepares reports on monitoring activities, findings, recommendations, and nutrition education and counseling units of service. Attends staff meetings to review monitoring activities, provides technical assistance on program development and comments on program policies and procedures. The RDN participates in statewide conference calls and trainings with other AAA RDNs and nutrition directors.

Technical Assistance and Training: the RDN provides technical assistance and training in food service practices, food and equipment specifications, sanitary code, new products, production efficiency, staff requirements, kitchen plans and the nutritional needs of the elderly. Other staff, under the direction of the RDN, may assist in the above as well as provide assistance with areas such as the use of computer software, networking with other agencies, initiating new services, contracting, client screening/assessments, application of program standards, developing job descriptions and job tasks, and reviewing and evaluating program costs and recommending cost saving measures.

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Diet Prescription Review: the RDN evaluates the appropriateness of diet orders, if any, and determines the type of diets to be provided by the program. The RDN reviews the appropriateness and necessity of nutrition supplements if provided by the program.

Case Management/Client Team Review: the RDN may participate in the team review and discussion of the client's assessment and care plan.

Individuals who are not considered to have comparable expertise are nurses, dietary managers, dietary supervisors, chefs, cooks, diabetes educators, home economists, food service managers, food service sanitarians, or extension agents unless they also meet one of the two sets of criteria listed above for individuals with comparable expertise.