



THE Children's
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Homeless Family Facility Nutrition Guidelines

These guidelines can be used as a tool to assess nutrition policies and practices in a homeless facility and identify strengths as well as areas that may be improved.

1. Optimize facility and family access to food resources.

- Develop linkages with organizations and businesses in the community to improve access to food resources. Churches, restaurants, grocery stores and local businesses may be willing to assist the shelter in meeting food service needs.
- Assist families in accessing resources, such as the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP), Self Help And Resource Exchange (SHARE), Food Stamp Program and other government resources.
- If serving congregate meals to children 12 years of age and under, apply for meal funding under the USDA's Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP).
- Encourage and assist parents to enroll their children in School Breakfast, School Lunch and summer food programs. Additionally, shelters can apply to be a summer meal site.
- Provide on-site and referral resources for emergency formula, food and special diet needs.
- Allow residents to retain food stamps and either WIC or CSFP vouchers for individual use to aid in meeting nutritional needs. Allow families to accrue these resources to establish a family food pantry which will aid in the transition to permanent housing.

2. If families are completely or partially responsible for their own meals, provide adequate resources for preparation of meals and snacks.

- Provide families with appropriate private cooking and refrigeration facilities.
- If only shared cooking and refrigeration facilities can be provided, develop policies and practices to deal with resulting issues, including adequate space, cleaning, security of stored foods and child safety in shared kitchen spaces.
- Assess a family's need for nutrition assistance and provide a "starter-set" of food items at the time of entrance into the facility, if indicated.
- Assess a family's need for food preparation equipment such as pots, pans and cooking utensils and provide a "starter set," if indicated.

- Assess and address a family's need for nutrition education, including healthy recipes, budgeting, meal planning and food safety.
- Assess the food shopping opportunities in the shelter's direct environment and, if indicated, arrange transportation to markets with nutritious and economical food selections.
- Promote food safety by providing families with education and necessary items such as dishwashing detergent, dishtowels and hand soap.

3. If the facility provides meals and/or snacks, plan menus that are appetizing, nutritious, ethnically appropriate and child-friendly.

- Ensure that meals include choices from all food groups in the USDA food guide pyramid.
- Make an effort to limit offerings of high calorie, high fat and low nutrient-density foods such as cakes, cookies, chips and doughnuts. Provide more nutritious foods, such as fresh fruits and vegetables and yogurt.
- If serving specific ethnic or religious groups, try to include some ethnic menus and menu items to accommodate varying preferences and religious practices.
- Plan the menu in accordance with needs and tastes of children. Offer alternatives for foods which are not safe or suitable for younger children. Provide child-sized eating utensils and arrange for appropriate child seating.
- If serving food cafeteria-style, try to accommodate individual requests for smaller portion sizes and allow individuals to decline certain items, especially for children and adults with poor appetite.
- Provide a forum for families to give menu suggestions and feedback regarding all aspects of food provision.
- Although families can assist in meal preparation and planning, having a professional cook is the most efficient way to ensure that meals are consistent in quality and food resources are used most economically. A professional cooking staff may also serve as a resource for training and education of residents and other staff members.
- If employing foodservice staff, periodically assess food safety procedures and the need for additional training. Provide foodservice staff with training opportunities when indicated (i.e., at local community colleges, area restaurants or via the Internet).
- Document and investigate facility food preparation and handling whenever vomiting and diarrhea, which are often symptoms of food-borne illnesses, occur among residents.

4. Identify common nutrition needs and develop policies and practices to meet those needs.

- Identify and screen for frequently occurring special nutrition needs in the population served. Special needs include those due to medical conditions such as

underweight, diabetes, lactose intolerance and food allergies, temporary illnesses such as influenza, diarrhea and vomiting. These needs also include non-medical choices such as vegetarian diets or abstinence from certain foods due to religious beliefs.

- Provide food and beverages which accommodate special needs, or help families to access them. Develop a plan to meet the identified needs of specific families, including nutrition education and referral of those with nutrition problems to a healthcare provider and/or nutritionist.
- Try to accommodate the medical provider or nutritionist's recommendations related to nutrition; this applies to facility practices and procedures as well as individual needs.
- Help pregnant and breastfeeding women meet increased nutritional needs by providing extra meals and snacks as well as a prenatal vitamin supplement. If this is not possible, assist pregnant and breastfeeding women in obtaining and storing these resources.
- Children need two or three healthy snacks in between meals to meet their nutritional needs. If snacks are not provided by the facility, families need access to refrigeration and food storage to allow them to meet this need.
- Encourage new mothers to breastfeed. Successful breastfeeding may be promoted by providing a quiet area for feeding, a supportive environment, access to a lactation consultant and a clean, safe place to refrigerate and/or freeze pumped breast milk.
- Assist mothers with formula feeding infants to provide adequate nutrition by allowing 24 hour flexible access to formula preparation, storage and sanitation. Ensure a sufficient quantity of formula by helping families to access WIC and providing emergency formula when necessary. A supply of emergency formula may be obtained through pediatricians' offices, the local Food Bank, or formula company sales representatives.
- Help families transition older infants to table food by providing or helping them provide appropriate foods of the right type and texture.
- Train shelter staff in nutrition and the specific nutrition needs of the population served.

5. Adopt facility regulations and services that improve nutrition status.

- Provide refrigeration and food storage in the family's room, so families can have better access to food and formula. Pest control and hygiene can be achieved by education, periodic inspections and regular use of a pest control service.
- Provide access to drinking water, especially during the summer months.
- Allow families to stay in their room during the day, or in a communal room in the facility, so they are able to feed children regular meals and snacks.
- If families are not allowed to remain in the facility during the day, at a minimum make arrangements with other facilities to provide shelter, meals and snacks

during that time period or supply families with a non-perishable food package for the day.

- If families are not allowed to remain in the facility during the day, make exceptions for families with young children or certain medical conditions and in extreme weather.

6. Food provides more than nutrients - let food and meals help to improve the living environment.

- If serving meals, try to create a pleasant, organized and calm eating environment. Using family-size tables to provide privacy at meal times can help children adjust to a new environment and improve food intake.
- If not serving meals routinely, organizing a regular group meal for families can help create a sense of community and provide an opportunity for education on a range of nutrition and non-nutrition topics.
- Ensuring appropriate nutrition in a less favorable environment requires substantial parenting skills and emotional strength from the parent. Parental frustration and depression can have an adverse effect on dietary intake of child and parent. To support the feeding relationship, provide a nurturing environment for the parent and child, with access to family support and counseling services.
- Partner with a local restaurant, chef or culinary school which may provide culinary training, a fundraiser and/or a festive event in the shelter. Community colleges with food service or nutrition courses may also be a valuable resource.

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