



# Meals on Wheels Meal Reduction Strategy Prioritizes Seniors at Greatest Nutritional Risk

Lola Stronach, MPHc, Nutritional Sciences, School of Public Health, University of Washington

Preceptor: Adam Porter, Senior Services Director of Nutrition



## Background

Meals on Wheels (MOW) is a 501(3) non-profit that was founded in 1974. The program's mission is to promote independent living among senior citizens in King County. By providing home delivered meals to homebound seniors, MOW prevents premature assisted living and promotes the nutritional health of this vulnerable population.

### Eligibility Criteria:

- 60+ years old
- Homebound
- Unable to prepare a meal
- Difficulty performing activities of daily living
- Limited informal support system

MOW receives funding from the Older Americans Act (OAA), client donations and private donations. The recent economic decline has resulted in donation decreases and only sustained funding from the OAA. This decline has resulted in an over-subscription of meals that has left MOW service unsustainable. As the proportion of King County residents who are 60+ increase (see graph), an increase in demand for MOW service is expected.



King County's 60+ Population, Number and Percent of Total Population (1)

## Aims

**The goal of this project was to create a plan in which clients of greatest need retained regular service, while clients of less need were put on a reduce meal service tier.**

- Categorize the MOW population based on nutrition risk
- Determine how clients will be identified
- Estimate the impact on annual meal volume
- Outline new workflows that parallel current workflows
- Layout monitoring and evaluation procedures

## Methods

### Research

- Successes/failures of previous efforts to reduce meal volume
- Strategies used by other MOW organizations in the US
- Demographics of current MOW clients

### Strategy

- Feasible interventions with the available resources
- Review of Senior Nutrition Program Standards and Policies for intervention compliance

### Forecasting

- Identifying clients of greatest nutritional risk
- Tier 1 client must meet 2 of the following:
  - Acute medical issue/Time consuming medical treatment
  - Nutrition risk score of 6+
  - Very low or low income
  - No social support
  - Needs assistance with 8+ Activities of Daily Living/ Instrumental Activities of Daily Living

- Identifying clients who will be affected by the reduction
- Calculating the reduction in meals
- Identifying external factors that may affect reduction

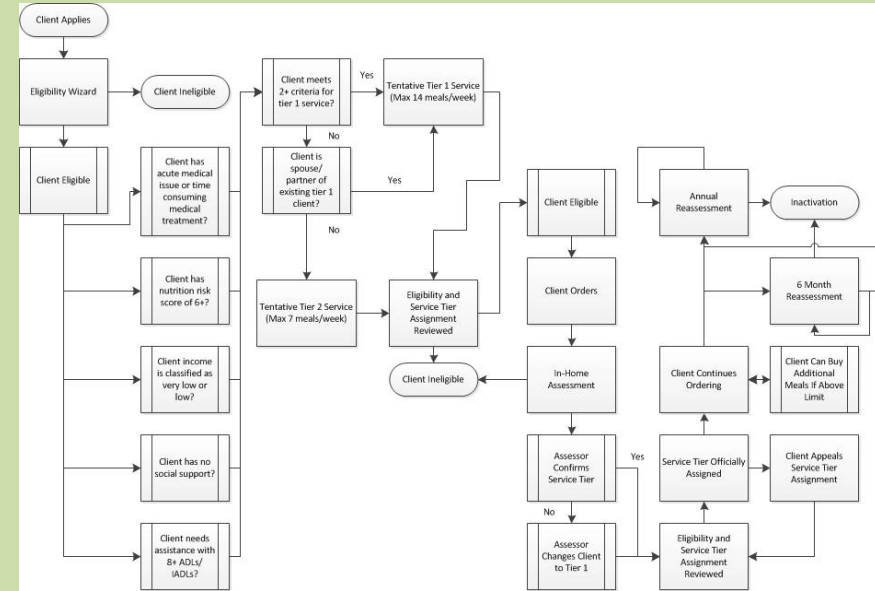
### Monitoring

- Clients needing additional resources
- Appealing service tier categorization
- Reassessment of client situation
- Monthly meal volume reductions

### Evaluation

- To take place 1.5 years after implementation
- Was the intervention successful in reducing total meal volume down to an acceptable level?
- Are clients' needs being met?
- Is the database correctly identifying tier 1 clients?
- Are assessors correctly identifying clients for tier 1 service?

## Service Tier Structure /Workflow



## Intended Impact

Based on the current client population it is estimated that:

- 74% of clients would be classified as Tier 1 (eligible for 14 meals per week)
- 26% of clients would be classified as Tier 2 clients
- The 26% of Tier 2 clients (7% overall) who order more than 7 meals per week would be affected by the intervention
- The annual meal reduction is estimated at 20,000 meals

## Challenges

Determining how many criteria a client must meet in order to be eligible for Tier 1 service

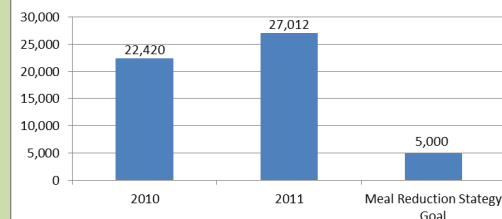
- Too few and not enough meals would be reduced, too many and too many meals would be reduced

Forecasting how many clients would actually be affected

- Current database is outdated and makes data collection time consuming
- Client population has high turnover
- Monthly meal demand varies based on holidays

Reducing meal volume without putting meal volume dependent funding at risk

## Number of Delivered Meals That Are Not Eligible For Reimbursement



## Reference

1. Aging and Disability Services. (2011). *Area Plan on Aging: Seattle-King County Washington 2012-2015*. Seattle, WA: Aging and Disability Services. [http://www.agingkingcounty.org/docs/AreaPlan2012-2015\\_Final.pdf](http://www.agingkingcounty.org/docs/AreaPlan2012-2015_Final.pdf)