
THIRD READING

Bill No: AB 1476
Author: Wallis (R), et al.
Amended: 8/29/25 in Senate
Vote: 21

SENATE HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE: 5-0, 6/30/25

AYES: Arreguín, Ochoa Bogh, Becker, Limón, Pérez

SENATE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE: 7-0, 8/29/25

AYES: Caballero, Seyarto, Cabaldon, Dahle, Grayson, Richardson, Wahab

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 79-0, 6/2/25 - See last page for vote

SUBJECT: Meal program: senior citizens

SOURCE: Author

DIGEST: This bill allows sites distributing at least one meal a day through the Congregate Meals Program to provide meals served hot or available as “to go” meals that can be consumed in a virtual congregate setting.

ANALYSIS:

Existing Law:

- 1) Establishes, in federal law, the Older Americans Act, which promotes the well-being of Americans 60 years old and above through services and programs designed to meet their needs. (42 United States Code (USC) 3001, et seq.)
- 2) Establishes the McCarthy-Kennick Nutrition Program for the Elderly Act of 1972. (Welfare and Institutions Code (WIC) 18325)
- 3) Recognizes the area agencies on aging (AAAs) to be the local units on aging in California that are supported by federal funding, state and local governmental

assistance, the private sector, and individual contributions, and assigns duties to those AAAs. (WIC 9402)

- 4) Requires the California Commission on Aging, with the approval of the Secretary of California Health and Human Services, to create an annual state plan to implement the Older Americans Act of 1965 and submit it to the federal government for approval (WIC 18326)
- 5) Requires the state plan to include: nutrition projects that provide at least one hot meal on site five or more days a week to eligible people 60 years old or older; requires those nutrition projects to be near concentrations of eligible individuals' residences; administrative methods to assure maximum participation of eligible individuals; provision of special menus, as specified; host projects in settings that allow for recreation, counseling, and referral services; provide appropriate modes of transportation; administration by people with relevant expertise; and nutrition education. (WIC 18327)
- 6) Requires between 10 percent and 20 percent of all funds expended for nutrition services to be available for meals to individuals in their residences. (WIC 18327.1)
- 7) Establishes the Nutrition Reserve Fund under the control of the Director of the Department of Aging and requires local AAAs to review local requests for funding from the fund. (WIC 18331)

This bill:

- 1) Allows sites that administer nutrition projects, pursuant to the McCarthy-Kennick Nutrition Program for the Elderly Act of 1972, and, five or more days per week provide at least one meal per day served hot, to also make that meal available to be picked up and eaten at home in a virtual congregate setting.
- 2) Removes the requirement that additional meals the site chooses to provide ensure recommended dietary allowances.

Comments

According to the author, "rising food costs are making it increasingly difficult for seniors to access the nutritious meals they need to maintain their health and well-being. Many older adults live on fixed incomes, and higher grocery prices can force tough choices between food, medicine and other essential expenses.

Addressing food insecurity is essential to ensure healthy, balanced meals to support our seniors. This bill will take the lessons we learned during COVID-19 and improve quality of life for seniors struggling with food insecurity.”

Services for California’s Older Adults. The CDA administers programs that serve older adults, adults with disabilities, family caregivers, and residents in long-term care facilities throughout the state. It administers funds allocated under the federal Older Americans Act, the state Mello-Granlund Older Californians Act, and through the Medi-Cal program.

CDA contracts with and provides leadership and direction to the 33 AAAs operating in California. AAAs play a key role in planning, developing, coordinating, and delivering a wide range of services and supports to consumers in their local planning service areas. They directly manage federal- and state-funded services that help older adults find employment; support older and disabled individuals to live as independently as possible in the community; promote healthy aging and community involvement; and assist family members serving as caregivers. They function as a community link at the local level for development of home- and community-based services provided under CDA’s programs.

Services provided by AAAs, or through their contracts with community providers, include: home adaptation funding; provision of assistive devices; support groups; nutrition programs, including congregate nutrition programs and home-delivered meal programs; disease prevention and health promotion programs; family caregiver support programs, including training and education; and supportive services programs. CDA develops guidance, identifies promising practices, and provides technical assistance to AAAs on effective strategies to better serve specific groups that have historically been underserved.

McCarthy-Kennick Nutrition Program for the Elderly Act of 1972. The Older Americans Act mandates states to create a plan to provide hot meals to older adults both at designated facilities and delivered to homes. This led to the enactment of the McCarthy-Kennick Nutrition Program for the Elderly Act of 1972. This act created the Older Adults Nutrition Program, which requires at least one hot meal a day be provided five or more days a week in senior centers and other locations throughout the state through the Congregate Meals Program, and food delivered thorough the Home-Delivered Nutrition Program for people 60 and over who are homebound due to illness or disability.

Beyond food, the programs also provides nutrition related services such as nutrition education, risk screening, and counseling. According to the California

State Plan on Aging, during fiscal year 2018-19, “nearly 6.9 million congregate meals and more than 11 million home-delivered meals were provided to a total of 212,725 people.”¹ Meals provided through the Congregate Meal Program are funded with Title III C-1 funds and Home-Delivered Nutrition is funded through Title III-C-2 funds, per federal law. This bill amends the Congregate Meals Program by allowing food funded with Title III C-1 funds to be picked up at these sites to be eaten at home, or eaten hot on site.

California Older Americans Act: State Plan on Aging 2021-2025. In order to receive federal funding, the Older Americans Act requires the state to designate a state agency as the sole state agency to create a state plan for services and administer that plan. In California, CDA is the entity that creates the plan. In the 2021-2025 state plan, the department identified six priorities for aging along with goals and objectives to achieve those priorities. Those priorities are:

- Public Information and Assistance
- Home and Community Living
- Long-Term Care Residents’ Rights and Well-being
- Inclusion, Equity, and Prevention of Isolation and Mistreatment
- Partnerships, Including with Tribal Organizations, Counties, Health Care, and Local Leaders
- Modernization of CDA and Strengthened Support for Aging “Hubs and Spokes” Statewide

To achieve the first priority, Public Information and Assistance, CDA has set a goal to support home and community living by empowering “people to live in homes and communities of choice by supporting nutrition, health and well-being, caregiving, and other services and supports through a diversity of culturally competent and in language providers.” The first objective to achieve that goal is to expand “equitable access to nutrition and nutrition information building on the record setting number of meals made distributed during the COVID-19 pandemic.” One of the strategies to achieve this expansion in access includes increasing the number of meals available “to go,” specifically to “explore emerging innovations in older adult nutrition programs, such as intergenerational community meal

¹ <https://aging.ca.gov/download.ashx?IE0rcNUV0zZW4jD5nrNRAA%3d%3d>

settings and ‘to go’ meals.” This bill aims to increase to the use of “to go” meals by giving all facilities the option to provide them.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the nutrition programs were modified to continue providing meals to seniors while following appropriate safety protocols. Changes to the program included more meal offerings including breakfast and weekend meals, adding “to go” options to congregate meals, and increasing the number of meal vendors. Since the end of the COVID-19 Major Disaster Declaration, CDA has issued guidance to AAAs that explained changes that would be incorporated as they to return to normal operations. This includes allowing to go meals to be funded through Title III C-1 funds but only if there is an in-person or virtual interaction.² Also, recently updated federal regulations allow 25 percent of the food served in Congregate Meal Programs to be “to go” options.³

The city of Calimesa saw unexpected benefits to their grab- and- go meal program for seniors administered by their Family Services Association. During the pandemic the program allowed seniors to maintain access to free meals while remaining safe, but it also attracted new people to their senior center where they learned about the services and activities available to them for the first time. According to city officials, their congregate meal program attracted 10 to 15 people before the pandemic, since then it has grown to 230 participants with 160 people being served every week. They have also seen increased participation in their other senior programming.

Since the pandemic, food insecurity remains a growing problem for older adults. Seniors with limited income still struggle to obtain balanced nutrition, especially if they have mobility or other health issues. Food insecurity increases the likelihood that seniors will face fast cognitive decline or be more prone to infection. The state has made a number of efforts to increase access to food like the expansion of CalFresh to allow Supplemental Security Income/State Supplementary Payment (SSI/ SSP) beneficiaries’ access to CalFresh led to an increase of senior CalFresh recipients. Nonprofit organizations, both funded by and supplementing government nutrition programs, also help by providing meals directly, but there is still a growing need. This bill seeks to address that need by expanding options for Congregate Meal Program sites to distribute foods and meet the needs of more of the community.

² Guidance for Area Agencies on Aging Regarding Return to Standard Operations for the Older Americans Act Programs Post-COVID-19 Major Disaster Declaration. February 3, 2023.

<https://www.aging.ca.gov/download.ashx?IE0rcNUV0zYKzCWhqig9%2bg%3d%3d>

³ OAA §1321.87(a)(1)(i-iii)

Related/Prior Legislation:

AB 2410 (Wallis, 2024) was nearly identical to this bill in that it would have allowed sites distributing meals through the Congregate Meals Program to provide meals served either hot or available as “to go” meals that can be reheated at home. AB 2410 was held in the Senate Appropriations Committee.

AB 1968 (Jackson, 2024) would require the Department of Social Services (CDSS), by January 1, 2026, and annually thereafter, to establish a system for automatic enrollment in the CalFresh program for individuals who meet eligibility requirements of the Supplemental Security Income/State Supplementary Program (SSI/SSP), and individuals who would otherwise meet the requirements for SSI/SSP, but are ineligible solely due to immigration status. AB 1968 was held in the Assembly Appropriations Committee.

AB 3135 (Eduardo Garcia, 2020) would have required the California Commission on Aging to study the impact of malnutrition on older adults in all health care settings in this state and to monitor the influence of malnutrition on older adults’ health care costs and outcomes and quality indicators, among other duties related to the prevention of malnutrition in older adults. AB 3135 failed passage in the Assembly Aging and Long Term Care Committee.

FISCAL EFFECT: Appropriation: No Fiscal Com.: Yes Local: No

According to the Senate Appropriations Committee, there are unknown ongoing General Fund costs, potentially ranging from the low hundreds of thousands to low millions, for Area Agencies on Aging to provide hot meals for to-go pick-up for consumption in a virtual congregate setting.

SUPPORT: (Verified 8/29/25)

AARP

Alzheimer's Association

California Commission on Aging

California Retired Teachers Association

City of Thousand Oaks

League of California Cities

Meals on Wheels California

OPPOSITION: (Verified 8/29/25)

None received

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 79-0, 6/2/25

AYES: Addis, Aguiar-Curry, Ahrens, Alanis, Alvarez, Arambula, Ávila Farías, Bains, Bauer-Kahan, Bennett, Berman, Boerner, Bonta, Bryan, Calderon, Caloza, Carrillo, Castillo, Chen, Connolly, Davies, DeMaio, Dixon, Elhawary, Ellis, Flora, Fong, Gabriel, Gallagher, Garcia, Gipson, Jeff Gonzalez, Mark González, Hadwick, Haney, Harabedian, Hart, Hoover, Irwin, Jackson, Kalra, Krell, Lackey, Lee, Lowenthal, Macedo, McKinnor, Muratsuchi, Nguyen, Ortega, Pacheco, Papan, Patel, Patterson, Pellerin, Petrie-Norris, Quirk-Silva, Ramos, Ransom, Celeste Rodriguez, Michelle Rodriguez, Rogers, Blanca Rubio, Sanchez, Schiavo, Schultz, Sharp-Collins, Solache, Soria, Stefani, Ta, Tangipa, Valencia, Wallis, Ward, Wicks, Wilson, Zbur, Rivas

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