

# How to Make Your Long-Term Care Foodservice Program More Efficient and Profitable—and Enjoyable for Residents



The number of Americans ages 65 and older grew by more than 52% between 2010 and 2020—and the demographic is projected to keep expanding for the next six years.<sup>1</sup>

Given that Americans who are now turning 65 have a nearly 70% chance of requiring long-term care services in the future, operators could soon face an even greater demand for foodservice programs that address long-term care facility residents' various dietary needs and preferences.<sup>2</sup>

The following strategies can help providers manage challenging operational factors such as food-related costs—78% of providers say this is currently a top objective.<sup>3</sup>

## Keep Variety Top Of Mind

With more than three-quarters (81%) of patients and residents consuming all their meals on-site, variety can be a key consideration for foodservice programs. What's more, 42% of long-term care/senior-living residents say they considered food options early in the selection process.<sup>4</sup>

Rotating the menu on a seasonal or other periodic schedule will provide fresh choices for long-term care residents. Serving an expansive selection of items on a daily basis, though, may increase the chance ingredients will remain unused and expire—or more dishes than necessary will be produced.

Given that restaurants are estimated to potentially recoup \$8 in savings for every dollar they invest in reducing waste, noncommercial foodservice operations could likely benefit from taking steps to optimize their ingredient use.<sup>5</sup>

Focusing on components that can be utilized in multiple dishes can help; frozen fruits and vegetables that can easily be thawed and served can reduce spoilage. Pantry staples such as **Campbell's® Condensed Healthy Request® Cream of Chicken Soup** offers a versatile ingredient that can be used in dishes such as **Baked Feta Cheese and Chicken Bowtie Pasta** or **Chicken and White Bean Enchiladas**.

Tracking how much food is being thrown away can potentially reduce food costs by 2% to 6%.

To start, audit your current usage to establish a baseline—which could help you identify ideal portion sizes and dishes that aren't popular enough to keep serving.<sup>5</sup>

Long-term care menus are continuing to contract with the amount of entrées and sides that are being offered.<sup>6</sup> Self-operated healthcare food and nutrition programs, in particular, may benefit from establishing strong business partnerships with vendor distributors and healthcare group purchasing organizations (GPOs)—who can often offer insight about augmenting supply chain efficiencies, spend analysis, and other elements.<sup>7</sup>

## Offer Healthy Options

Research has shown that nutritious eating can positively affect a person's quality of life; one recent study, for instance, found adhering to a diet that's rich in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and healthy fats can increase the likelihood you'll function well physically and mentally at age 70.<sup>8</sup>

The majority of long-term care residents—75%—say they're interested in healthy dining options. Diabetic (56%), low-fat (49%), and sugar-free (47%) diets are the most frequently offered special eating plans in healthcare environments. More than a third of healthcare consumers (36%) also have expressed an interest in seeing more low- and lower-sodium selections.<sup>9, 11, 12</sup>

Flavor, though, can affect whether residents opt for and ultimately enjoy dishes. Roughly 42% say they're looking for comfort food choices.<sup>9</sup>

Long-term care facilities can fulfill the desire for delicious and nutritious items by serving dishes that include both taste and health-oriented appeal—such as this **Breakfast Casserole**, which is made with **Campbell's® Condensed Healthy Request® Cream of Mushroom Soup** and is less than 200 calories per serving.

If a foodservice program has the budget to invest in software systems, they can also be an advantageous inclusion. In addition to assisting with food-waste cost-reduction efforts, tech solutions—such as meal-planning technology, which 72% of providers use—may be able to help providers reduce patient-safety risk factors like allergy-related ingredient errors.<sup>6, 7</sup>

## Mitigate Labor Costs

Staffing can be a pain point for healthcare foodservice operators. Senior dining, hospital, and other acute-care facilities experienced hiring and recruitment (62%) and retention (49%) challenges in 2023.<sup>11</sup> To address labor concerns, organizations are relying on practices such as offering retention bonuses and creating career ladders within departments. Training opportunities can help foodservice team members advance within—and want to stay with—the organization. The use of an online culinary education platform that provides food prep and other instruction, for example, has helped food and nutrition services company Morrison Healthcare improve retention rates.<sup>11</sup>

Other operational tweaks can help long-term care foodservice programs increase efficiency and reduce labor needs.

Casseroles and slow-cooked meats can be prepared between meal-service times to maintain productivity; consolidating activities like product selection and menu development can prevent redundancy, particularly if a program has multiple dining locations.<sup>7</sup>

Facilities that are short-staffed can potentially reduce prep time by using ready-to-serve and frozen menu items, which can be assembled much faster than dishes that are prepared from scratch.

**Campbell's® Culinary Reserve Frozen Ready-to-Eat Reduced-Sodium Vegan Vegetable Soup**, for example, is available in 4-pound pouches that can be easily heated and served, either alone or with a salad, sandwich, or other accompaniment.

Certain items can also be used as speed-scratch ingredients to help reduce the number of steps involved in meal prep without sacrificing quality. **Campbell's® Condensed Healthy Request® Tomato Soup** simply requires water to be added before simmering; it can be served as a standalone dish or used in casseroles, **saucers**, and other recipes.

In long-term care settings, carefully balancing supply costs with staffing resources and what residents want in a dining experience can be critical to ensuring the facility's foodservice program is successful.

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2. **How Much Care Will You Need?**, Department of Health and Human Services, LongTermCare.gov, February 18, 2020

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5. **Working to Reduce Food Waste**, National Restaurant Association, April 1, 2024

6. **Healthcare Segment Guide 2023**, Datassential, 2023

7. **Food & Nutrition Service Best Practices in Financial Management**, Association for Healthcare Foodservice, 2021

8. **Nutrition 2024: Study Correlates Healthy Midlife Diet and Better Life Quality in Old Age**, Nutrition Insight, July 4, 2024

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