

# Great Plates Delivered Program



**Cal OES**  
GOVERNOR'S OFFICE  
OF EMERGENCY SERVICES



California Health & Human Services Agency

## NASCIO 2021 State IT Recognition Awards

<b>Category:</b>	Digital Services - Government to Citizen
<b>Project Initiation:</b>	April 24, 2020
<b>Project Completion:</b>	Continuing
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## Executive Summary

The COVID-19 pandemic had a devastating impact on millions of Californians. Older Californians were among the hardest hit because they had a greater chance of severe illness and death due to the virus. As a result, older adults who stayed home to protect themselves often experienced challenges accessing food. Visits to the grocery store were curtailed, group meals were canceled, and not everyone could rely on friends and neighbors.

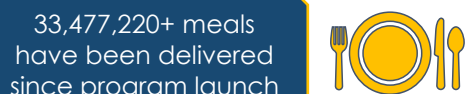
On April 10, 2020, The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) authorized the state of California and its local governments throughout the state to implement an emergency feeding program. This authorization included approval for costs related to providing prepared meals to individuals who are "at higher risk for serious illness from COVID-19" as defined by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

Under the overarching parameters established by the Emergency Feeding Program Framework approved by FEMA on April 24, 2020, California Governor Gavin Newsom announced the Great Plates Delivered Program. The Great Plates Delivered Program provides prepared meals for adults 65 and older and adults 60-64 who are at high-risk, unable to prepare meals or access food resources and are also ineligible for existing state and federal feeding programs. In addition, this program supports local restaurants, agricultural workers, and other food service providers who have closed or are struggling to remain open due to the ongoing pandemic.

The Great Plates Delivered Program is a collaborative program involving the California Governor's Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES), California Health and Human Services Agency (CHHS), and various California local governments and local food businesses. Since its inception, the program has strengthened partnerships among governments at the federal, state, and local level, in addition to improving collaboration and contact between government, local food businesses, and older Californians during the pandemic.



40 local governments have successfully carried out program operations



33,477,220+ meals have been delivered since program launch



800+ local food businesses have prepared meals



55,000+ older Californians have participated



9,500+ jobs have been supported



## Idea

Since the nationwide emergency declaration issued by the President on March 13, 2020, many states struggled to keep older adults safe from the COVID-19 virus. Older adults are especially vulnerable to COVID-19, as individuals 65 years and above have accounted for 74% of COVID-related deaths in California and are generally considered at higher risk for severe illness or hospitalization from the virus.<sup>1</sup> With approximately 8.6 million Californians aged 60 years and above, and 17% of that age group living alone, the potential for this population to experience food insecurity increased with social and physical distancing, congregate meal site closures, and food industry restrictions.<sup>2</sup>

Acknowledging the challenges that older adults faced with the novel coronavirus and its associated disease, California state leaders worked together to quickly assemble an emergency feeding program dedicated to serving the older adult population. Failure to address this issue could have led to an increase in disease transmission, hospitalizations, and COVID-related deaths within this population. Implementing the program also ensured proper nutrition for older adults who could also have experienced health effects related to food insecurity. The framework became known as the Great Plates Delivered Program, the nation's first emergency feeding program dedicated to protecting this vulnerable population and built in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This program focused on two major goals:

- Delivering healthy meals safely to vulnerable older adults, and
- Softening the Stay At Home Order's effects on local food businesses.

The Great Plates Delivered Program is innovative and distinct from similar initiatives. Participating local governments can apply for 100% federal cost share for all eligible program work for costs associated with the purchase and distribution of food and prepared meals to older adults requiring emergency feeding program services as a result of COVID-19.<sup>3</sup> This program also:

- Leverages existing networks and structures to provide meals to older, high-risk Californians who are ineligible for other federally funded food assistance programs;
- Employs a community engagement strategy to emergency management that other states can implement during disasters;
- Positions the state as a coordinator and local governments as key leaders in organizing and administering an emergency program that best meets community needs; and
- Engages private and nonprofit sectors, such as local food businesses, community organizations, and the general public, in conjunction with state and federal governmental partners, while building confidence, trust, and collaborative efforts between governments and their citizens.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/older-adults.html>

<sup>2</sup> <https://aging.ca.gov/download.ashx?IE0rcNUV0zacjOqruYRqcg%3d%3d>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/02/02/memorandum-maximizing-assistance-from-the-federal-emergency-management-agency/>

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.nascio.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/NASCIO\\_CIOpTenPriorities.pdf](https://www.nascio.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/NASCIO_CIOpTenPriorities.pdf)



## Implementation

Faced with an unprecedented pandemic and a critical need to keep vulnerable older Californians safe from the pandemic, Cal OES and CHHS, working with the California Department of Aging (CDA) and California Labor and Workforce Development Agency (LWDA), developed and launched the Great Plates Delivered Program within a 3-week period. An interdisciplinary network of state leaders created a multiagency plan to leverage available federal, state, and local resources. With the approval from the federal government for FEMA Public Assistance funding, leaders from Cal OES, CHHS, CDA, and LWDA quickly activated state staff to begin reaching out to local governments interested in administering the program for their community and providing local leaders with supporting guidance documents to help carrying out program operations.

Once local government leaders organized and tailored program operations that best served the needs of their communities using the state's guidance documents, local government leaders and their staff then oversaw all program operations and provided weekly program updates to the state. Since Governor Newsom's announcement of Great Plates Delivered, 40 county and city governments have implemented the program under the guidance of 15 Cal OES and CHHS employees.

### Using Simple Technology to Achieve Great Things

While the Great Plates Delivered Program has saved lives, businesses, and jobs, the technology behind it was relatively simple. Initially developed by CHHS within a 5-day period, the website was built as an addition to California's official website for coronavirus (COVID-19) response updates. The site includes a custom-made tool that allowed interested local food businesses to apply for meal preparation in various cities and counties. It was developed to make the user experience as seamless as possible for older adults, interested local governments, and local food businesses.

The webpage offers quick access to program eligibility requirements, contact information of participating local governments, program guidance and FAQ documents, additional meal delivery resources, state guidance for senior living facilities, California older adult crisis hotlines, and caregiver resources. Interested local food businesses and volunteers can also fill out an online form to forward their contact information to a participating local government in their area. The interested food provider online form is then sent to participating local governments to determine which food providers will be chosen to participate and delivery meals for the program.

Since program launch, more than 5,000 restaurants, food kitchens, and local catering businesses throughout the state have submitted an online form to apply for the program. At the program's peak, more than 800 local food businesses prepared meals for program participants each day. Cal OES and CHHS employees also monitor pageviews, searches, and user requests and frequently discuss ways to make the website more user-friendly for our target audiences. A centralized program email inbox is also available and monitored seven days a



week to respond to inquiries from applicants, participants, food businesses, local governments and various media outlets interested in learning more about the program.

## Program Management Approach



### State & Federal Governments

Cal OES and CHHS oversee all major communication between local government program administrators and partnering federal, state, and local government leaders. Cal OES and CHHS are responsible for creating the framework, program guidance, FAQ documents, quality assurances documents, and data reporting questionnaires, in addition to maintaining the website, hosting weekly conference calls with local government leaders, and monitoring the centralized email inbox. In addition, Cal OES and CHHS report statewide program data and write program reimbursement time extension requests on behalf of the state to FEMA every month. FEMA is responsible for reviewing the framework, monthly program data reports, and program reimbursement time extension requests.



### Local Governments

Participating local governments oversee the implementation, management, and administration of program operations under the guidance of state government leaders. Participation is optional. Local governments are responsible for enrolling eligible Californians through a self-certification process, conducting community outreach, selecting multiple licensed local food providers that prioritize local jobs, worker retention, worker health and safety, and standards of equity and fairness in employment practices, wages, hiring, and promotion to participate, in addition to establishing meal delivery services to participants that include appropriate background check procedures and submitting weekly data collection reports and local program updates to Cal OES and CHHS.



### Local Food Businesses, Meal Delivery Operators, and Volunteers

Local food businesses, meal delivery operators, and volunteers oversee meal preparation and delivery to program participants. Local food businesses are responsible for meeting volume, nutritional standards, cultural and other dietary restrictions of program participants. Meal delivery operators are responsible for partnering with local government leaders and local food businesses to determine the most effective meal delivery operations. Volunteers may also be utilized under the guidance and direction of local government leaders to assist with program operations where needed.



### Program Participants

Individuals interested in obtaining program benefits must undergo a short screening process. Individual participant eligibility verification can be completed over the phone and can be obtained through self-attestation, similar to other eligibility verification for programs such as school meals and Disaster CalFresh. As soon as eligibility is verified, the individual will provide the necessary operational information, such as address, any dietary restrictions, etc. and receive program benefits of up to three (3) prepared meals a day.

## Extended Federal Support for Program Eligible Costs

Program costs are reimbursed by the federal government through the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) Public Assistance (PA) program at 100% FEMA share per the White House Memorandum to Extend Federal Support to Governors' Use of the National



Guard to Respond to COVID-19 and to Increase Reimbursement and Other Assistance Provided to States published on January 21, 2021. Cal OES and CHHS provide program reimbursement extension request letters on behalf of the participating local governments to FEMA every month as authorization for federal reimbursement is required every 30 days. The total program cost depends on the local government that administers and manages program operations.

## **Using Leading Practices Around Accessibility to Sustain Nutrition for Older Adults During the Pandemic**

Although the Great Plates Delivered Program was specifically created to deliver healthy meals to qualifying older adults and promote economic stimulus to the food and restaurant industries, the program also allowed participating local governments to actively engage in the following leading practices:

- Checking on the health, safety, and welfare of this at-risk population at the height of the public health crisis;
- Conducting community outreach and developing ways to better communicate with the older adult population and local food businesses;
- Encouraging the use of other currently available food and nutritional programs and local community food banks to support those struggling and help bridge the meal gap during the pandemic;
- Building local volunteer workforces; and
- Integrating existing networks and governmental structures with public, private, and non-governmental partners to carry out emergency food program operations in a safe and effective manner.

## **Impact**

The success of the Great Plates Delivered Program is rooted in the innovative and collective vision of federal, state, and local government leaders who sought to support older Californians and small and mid-sized local food businesses amid the ongoing pandemic. The implementation and continuation of this program exceeded initial expectations by creating new partnerships between governments, local businesses, and the citizens that make up the community that they serve. The successes of the Great Plates Delivered Program include:

- More than 33 million meals served to over 55,000 older Californians since program launch;
- More than 9,500 jobs supported by more than 800 local food businesses;
- Participation from 40 local government entities;

Presently, various local governments continue to administer the program to meet the needs of older California residents who are most impacted as Cal OES and CHHS continue to advocate for additional program reimbursement extensions to FEMA, work directly with participating local governments to help expedite the federal reimbursement process, and respond to any program related questions, comments, and concerns. The incredible stories





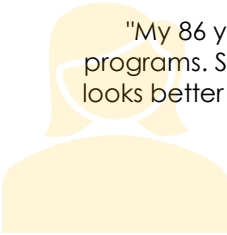
and lessons learned from the individuals participating in the program will continue to benefit how California state and local governments use whole-community partnerships to plan, fund, organize, and implement emergency feeding programs for vulnerable populations during a disaster. Impacts from the Great Plates Delivered Program are shared in the quotes below.

## Testimonies



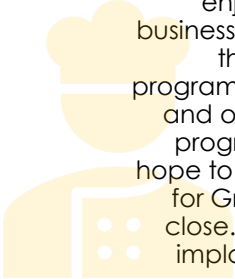
"We are so grateful for the delicious meal you provided us on Thanksgiving day. Usually, our six adult children and seven grandchildren would have filled our home with noisy chaos and lots of warm hugs. Smells of delicious food cooking would have wafted about the house and out the windows. Instead, my husband and I spent a quiet day alone with our adult son who lives with disabilities. I had a hard time with thinking this was a happy Thanksgiving. The delicious meal you sent to us changed my feeling to that of gratitude. I felt cared for and peaceful. Please, thank the cooks and all of your crew. Your labor and attention are providing a wonderful service to those of us who are elderly and rather isolated during these difficult times. Lastly, Jorge is a delight. His daily delivery lifts my spirits. He is professional, kind, and polite. May God's strength surround all of you as you continue to provide this vital service. I know times are hard. Know that I see you and feel your struggle. I am sending you oodles of thanks as you continue to serve."

(Program Participant, 11/27/20)



"My 86 year old mother was having trouble getting meals due to COVID impacts on other programs. She said to me yesterday that whoever thought of this did a really good thing. She looks better than she has in a long time since she is getting good food! Thank You so much to everyone who brought this together!"

(Daughter of Program Participant, 11/2/20)



"As the owner of Tequila Museo Mayahuel and other restaurants, our team and myself have enjoyed almost 9 years of successful operation in Downtown Sacramento. Today, my business on 12th and K street and others in the Downtown area are facing the real danger that we won't be able to stay open or even re-open. First, we are all grateful for the program and very happy to be of assistance. Second, The Great Plates Delivered Program and other assistance programs have defined the survival of my business at this time...This program has been a lifeline for seniors, restaurants and Paratransit drivers. It has offered hope to each of these sectors both in the immediate and in hope for a better future. If not for Great Plates Delivered and other assistance programs, it's likely I would be forced to close. This program enables me to pay my employees and continue to stay in business. I implore you to extend this program, and by doing so, extend a lifeline to the businesses which define the Downtown Sacramento community and scene."

(Local Food Business, 6/23/20)



"The program's success is an example of what's possible when federal, state and local leaders set aside politics and come together to protect our communities from the threat of COVID-19."

(California Governor Gavin Newsom, 6/19/20)

<https://www.gov.ca.gov/2020/06/19/governor-newsom-helps-prepare-meals-at-sacramento-restaurant-as-part-of-great-plates-delivered-program/>

