

Section 1

Background Information

Topics in this section include:

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1.1 Introduction

The Planning a Healthy Menu toolkit is for operators of Supportive Living sites, personal care homes, home living sites, group homes and lodges in Alberta. It is a “how-to-guide” to help the site plan, prepare, and provide healthy menus and nutrition care to residents. This applies to both large and small supportive living sites, group homes, and other congregate living options.¹

Who is this toolkit for?

All staff involved in food service, food programs, and nutrition care, including operators, food service staff, nursing, dietitians, health care professionals and recreation staff, can use this toolkit.

How can this toolkit help supportive living sites, personal home living sites, group homes and lodges? This toolkit:

- Supports operators in meeting the Government of Alberta Continuing Care Standards: [Continuing Care Accommodation and Health Service Standards](#)¹
- Provides menu examples and step by step guidance to build a healthy menu to meet the nutrition requirements of [Canada's food guide](#).²
- Offers guidance to meet the dietary needs of residents requiring special diets, such as Texture Modified (Pureed or Minced) or other diets (High Protein, High Calorie diets), by adapting available regular menu items.
- Provides nutrition information on special topics such as malnutrition, hydration, and dementia.

What is in this toolkit?

This toolkit can be used to revise, improve, or create a new menu. It provides:

- Guidance on how to plan a menu step-by-step including a sample 1-week menu.
- Information on how to standardize portion sizes, read labels, and budget for menu items.
- Guidance on menu substitutions for special diets, such as texture modified, vegetarian, low-lactose, and gluten-free diets.

Nutrition Services

- Helpful hints and processes to help ensure that all residents have the ability to meet their nutrition and fluid needs at each meal.
- Suggestions for promoting and optimizing nutrient intake by providing a menu based on nutrient-dense foods, that are appropriate to the residents' culture, religion, and personal preferences.
- Information regarding the special needs of residents with dementia and providing assistance with meals.
- Recommendations for preventing malnutrition in residents by using appropriate screening tools and supporting intake with high protein, high calorie food choices.
- Information regarding signs and symptoms of dehydration, and tips to improve fluid intake.

The toolkit provides general guidelines and suggestions for planning a healthy and enjoyable menu. It is not in the scope of the toolkit to provide specific detailed menus. It is important for each individual site to consider the cultural, religious, and personal preferences of its residents when creating a menu.

1.2 Government of Alberta Supportive Living Accommodation Standards

The Continuing Care Act regulates the full spectrum of continuing care services and settings in Alberta, including continuing care homes, supportive living accommodations, and home and community care. The Act establishes authority and oversight for licensing, accommodations, and the delivery of publicly funded health care in the continuing care system. It includes requirements for licensing, compliance and enforcement actions, and appeals. Visit: [Continuing Care Legislation and Standards](#)³ for more information about these standards and regulations.

- The [Continuing Care Accommodation and Health Service Standards](#)¹ (CCHSS) are a legislated requirement of operators pursuant to the Continuing Care Regulation under the Continuing Care Act. The standards set the minimum requirement that operators in the continuing care system must comply with. The [Supportive Living Accommodation in Alberta, A Guide to New Continuing Care Legislation](#)⁴ provides an overview of Alberta's continuing care system, with a focus on supportive living accommodations.

The Standards support a safe and comfortable environment that helps maintain or enhance the quality of life for Albertans residing in supportive living accommodations. The standards apply to sites that:

- house 4 or more adult residents not related to the operator
- are intended for permanent or long-term residency
- provide safety and security services
- provide accommodation services such as meals, housekeeping, and social or leisure activities

[Getting Started: Continuing Care Licensing Handbook](#)⁵ is an introduction to assist operators of continuing care homes and supportive living accommodations to meet the licensing requirements.

Standards 13 and 14 relate to the Nutritional and Menu Requirements from the [Accommodation Standards - Supportive Living Accommodation](#)⁶

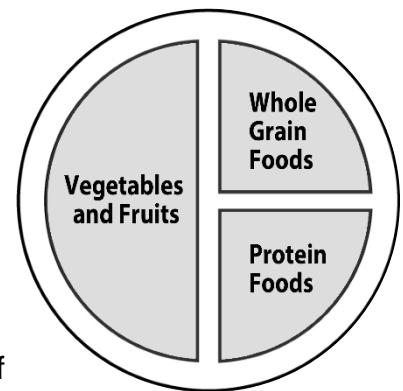
1.3 Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide

All sites must ensure all meals, snacks, and fluids provided, meet the current nutrition recommendations set forth by [Canada's food guide](#).²

Canada's food guide defines and promotes healthy eating for Canadians of all ages.² It recommends eating a variety of healthy foods each day:

- [Vegetables and Fruits](#)
- [Grain Foods](#)
- [Protein Foods](#)
- [Making Water your Drink of Choice](#)

Eating according to Canada's food guide helps Canadians meet their individual nutrient needs, which contributes to overall health and vitality.² This can help to reduce the risk of obesity and other chronic diseases.²



[Canadas food guide](#)² is available in languages other than English from the [Health Canada](#) website.

1.4 Food Safety

Safe food handling is important to reduce the risk of food-borne illness. If food is not safely prepared, handled, and stored, bacteria can grow on it and produce harmful substances called toxins. These bacteria and toxins in food (which cannot be seen, smelled, tasted, or felt) can cause food-borne illness if the food is eaten. It is commonly called “food poisoning”. Symptoms of food-borne illness vary, but can include nausea, vomiting, and/or diarrhea. Older adults, young children, pregnant women, and those with weakened immune systems are at greater risk for severe bouts of food-borne illness.⁷

The four principles of safe food handling are clean, separate, cook, and chill.⁷

1. Clean

- Ensure all staff handling food, wash hands with warm water and soap for 20 seconds before handling food, during preparation, after using the toilet, and when finished preparing food.
- Wash all vegetables and fruit under cool running water before eating or cooking.
- Clean utensils and cooking surfaces (including microwaves) with soap and hot water, before, during, and after preparation.
- Sanitize countertops, cutting boards, and utensils after use. Use the sanitizing solution available at the facility or mix a mild bleach solution by combining 1 tsp (5 mL) bleach to 3 cups (750 mL) water. Store the mild bleach solution in a spray bottle labeled “sanitizer”.
- Wash the tops of cans and jars before opening.
- Clean can openers, blenders, and mixer blades before/after each use.
- Clean lunch bags every day with hot, soapy water, or bleach sanitizer.
- Wash and sanitize the refrigerator and food preparation equipment on a regular established cycle. This should also include faucets, sink drains, fridge handles, and small appliances.

2. Separate

- Store raw foods, including uncooked meat, fish, and poultry tightly covered in sealed containers
- Keep raw foods below cooked foods in the refrigerator. Keep eggs covered or in original container.
- Keep raw eggs, meats, poultry, fish, and their juices separated from other food during storage and preparation.
- Use three separate cutting boards to prepare food. Use 1 board for produce, 1 for uncooked meat, fish, and poultry, and 1 for cooked meat.

3. Cook

- Cook foods to recommended temperatures and serve immediately.
- See the Health Canada's [Safe Cooking Temperatures](#) web page to get more information.⁸
- Reheat foods to 74°C (165°F).

4. Chill

- Ensure refrigerator(s) and freezer(s) are set at the correct temperatures. The refrigerator temperature should be 4°C (40°F) or colder. The freezer temperature should be -18°C (0°F) or colder.
- Keep raw meat, poultry, fish, and seafood cold. Refrigerate or freeze these after delivery or as soon as possible after purchase.
- Refrigerate fresh fruits and vegetables, including all pre-cut and ready-to-eat produce after delivery or as soon as possible after purchase.
- Never leave raw meat, poultry, fish, seafood, or leftovers out on the counter for longer than two hours.
- Leftovers should be refrigerated or frozen within two hours of serving. Place in shallow, covered containers or zip locked plastic bags for quick cooling. Label with food name, preparation date, and time refrigerated or frozen.
- Refrigerated and frozen leftovers should be used in accordance with the guidelines provided by Health Canada's [Safe Food Storage Guidelines](#).⁷

For more information

- [The Environmental and Public Health Education Program](#)⁹ at Alberta Health Services offers home study courses in food safety and preparation. The online food safety course is recommended for operators that do not have a current food safety certificate.
- Food Safety training is strongly recommended for anyone handling food.
- For information on food safety, visit the Health Canada's [Safe Food Storage](#) web pages.⁷

1.5 Food Allergies and Intolerances

It is important to know if any residents have food allergies, intolerances, or diseases which could affect the foods they can eat.

Food allergies

Food allergies can be life threatening. Common food allergens are [peanuts](#), [eggs](#), [milk](#), [tree nuts](#), [wheat](#), [soy](#), [sesame](#), [fish](#), [shellfish](#), [sulphites](#), and [mustard](#).¹⁰ A food allergy occurs when the body's immune system responds to the protein in food in the wrong way.⁹

Health Canada's website contains more information on [Food Allergies](#).

A resident with food allergies can have severe reactions to even very small amounts of the food allergen.¹⁰ Ensure all meals, snacks, and drinks prepared for someone with a food allergy do not contain any of the food allergens. Some ingredients, or entire recipes from the menu, may have to be changed to meet the needs of the resident.

Health Canada's website has more information on [Allergens and Gluten Sources Labelling](#).

All food storage and preparation methods should ensure foods are kept separate to prevent cross-contamination of foods at all stages.¹⁰ Cross-contamination occurs when a food or ingredient is accidentally spread to other foods or items by touching with hands, other foods, utensils, cutting boards, or counter tops.

Food intolerances

Food intolerance is a reaction to a food or food additive that does not involve the immune system. For example, lactose intolerance is sensitivity to the natural sugars found in some milk products. Some people may not be able to tolerate lactose-containing foods at all, while others may be able to eat small servings of the lactose-containing foods without side effects.

For more information, refer to the [Lactose Intolerance](#) topic and treatment overview page on MyHealth.alberta.ca.

If there are residents with food allergies or intolerances, it is important to have this information posted in the kitchen. A sample [Food Allergies, Intolerances, and Restrictions Record](#) can be found in Appendix 1A. This record can be adapted to meet the needs of the facility.

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