



Emergency food supply for health and community services

Updated 14 April 2020

The Department of Health and Human Services (the department) is committed to the ongoing supply of cooked meals to public and private health services, aged care facilities, meals-on-wheels services, homecare and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services.

While there are no current issues with the supply of cooked meals to these services, the department has established the Health and Community Services Emergency Food Strategy Group to ensure that cooked meals continue to be available to health and community services during coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

Establishing a food bank

To provide individual frozen meals as needed, the Health and Community Services Emergency Food Strategy Group has established an emergency food bank using public hospital providers. The group may engage private sector providers in the future if required.

To ensure appropriate meals are provided to clients and patients, the food bank will store both Class 1 meals (health and aged care-appropriate) and Class 2 meals (for Meals on Wheels and other community services). A food bank meal catalogue is being developed to help address clinical and cultural requirements as required.

Emergency food supply

An emergency food supply will be provided to health and community services when a facility's meal preparation capability is significantly disrupted due to staff absenteeism or forced isolation arising from coronavirus (COVID-19) exposure. Depending on the support required, the group offers three response levels for supplying food to health and community services:

LEVEL 1: Low-level assistance – local response:

The requesting facility makes alternate arrangements using existing or other resources or supplies. Health Purchasing Victoria (HPV) will provide details of suppliers who can assist the facility.

LEVEL 2: Moderate-level assistance – assistance required within one to three days:

HPV will assist the requesting facility to access food stocks from health services or private operators.

LEVEL 3: Emergency requirement – one- to three-hour response:

Draw on food bank stocks of cook-freeze / shelf-stable meals and gradually transition the requesting facility to food supplies from alternative providers, assisted by HPV.

HPV has engaged the services of two of its existing food distributors – Cadell Food Services and Nature’s Cargo – to meet the food bank’s frozen storage and logistics requirements. Meal stocks will be located at a range of locations across Victoria to ensure rapid provision where required.

To access the health and community services food bank, please email COVID19foodrequests@dhhs.vic.gov.au or call the department on 9096 9006.

This service is currently available Monday to Friday from 8.30am-4:00pm, with limited coverage on weekends and public holidays. Opening hours may be expanded as the situation evolves, and the department will determine the appropriate response level of each request and respond accordingly.

If you would like to discuss this further, please contact COVID19foodrequests@dhhs.vic.gov.au.