

Meals Victoria Provider Survey 08 Launch

Opening Speech (Notes)

March 4th 09

William Angliss College

Good morning, my name is Nelson Mathews, Spokesperson for Meals Victoria

A warm welcome to everyone, thank you for making time to attend the launch of Meals Victoria Provider Survey. I'd like to welcome representatives from the MAV, DHS and Member of Parliament, Don Nardella

(The Minister for Mental Health, Community Services and Senior Victorians, the Hon Lisa Neville is an apology today, she's touring fire affected areas with Premier, John Brumby)

I'd like to thank meals providers especially those who have travelled long distances to be here today.

I'd like to thank the Minister, the Hon. Lisa Neville for throwing her support behind the compilation and printing of this document. And those working at the HACC Program for their support, Calvin Graham, and in particular Christine Adams for working so closely with us and organising the design, editing and printing.

I'd like to make special mention of the work of the Meals Victoria Committee, in particular, Secretary Lori Coates, Treasurer Sandra Tweedly and of course the dedicated and hardworking President, Mabel Torres. And while I'm at it, Mabel's assistant Suzanne Mateos for all her hard work.

Meals Victoria

- Other States have a more centralised approach to MOW
- In Victoria each organisation (mostly local government) is responsible for its own delivered meals program)
- Meals Victoria was formed because there was ...
... no forum for those working within the sector to compare notes, exchange ideas and talk about planning issues.

We've done quite a bit in the past 6 years ...

- Started to establish regional groups, although we've still got a long way to go.
- Developed a website
- Early on we developed a relationship with Judith Appleton and Deakin University and completed the pithily titled, "The importance of home delivered meals to the energy and nutrient intake of older Australians – a pilot study" which is soon to be submitted to the Asia Pacific Journal of Clinical Nutrition.

However, all this was well and good. But whenever we were asked questions by members, the general public, the department, university students, or journalists, we could only provide anecdotal information.

- In short, we decided we needed a database.
- The concept of the Meals Provider Survey began to take shape.

The Survey

-On the suggestion of a member, we engaged the services of Datatab a small research and data analysis company.

-We organised workshops with members

- To had to work out WHAT WE WANTED TO KNOW.

-We then formulated a survey questionnaire and the project just got bigger and bigger and bigger.

-Then the phone survey began.

-We achieved an extraordinary 100% participation rate from the sector. This was for 3 reasons-

1. The survey was confidential, so people were free to say what they liked- important in getting an accurate picture.
2. Meals providers could sense that the questions were relevant and designed by people like them.
3. The persistence, commitment and sensitivity of Kim and Meagan from Datatab. This turned out to 1 ½ hour survey.
 - They made and rescheduled appointments, rang back people who had to follow up on information.
 - Added in adjunct questions after the first few surveys after feedback from respondents, they were very flexible in this respect.
 - And while slotting in the raw data, recorded hundreds of comments

The combination of qualitative and quantitative data is what makes this project special

A HUGE, thank you to Kim and Meagan.

What did we find?

-We produce almost 3.8 million meals a year

An interesting footnote. There are always peaks and troughs in numbers, but the minor drop at present is completely consistent with ABS Stats. In fact the population of people over 80, the major % of people receiving meals, will start to rise over the next 5 years and more than double in the following 20 years.

The breakdown of contribution to total costs-

-Clients contribute over 56% of the total cost

-Organisations (mostly local government), 35%

-The HACC Program, 14.7%

(The troops out there will not be please if I don't repeat the mantra in the sector, that I ... "the subsidy is too low")

There are too many findings to go into, so here's a random selection ...

-difference between metro and rural is often significant in key areas such as meal choice, computer software, food safety and staff/volunteer training.

-while some meals are delivered in a trolley down main street some delivery runs are up to 200km in length

-rural providers are more likely to attract corporate volunteering than metro providers

-the average number of choices for the main course meal is 3

-almost all providers cater for special dietary needs, including allergies and 70% cater for likes and dislikes.

-only 64% of volunteers in Victoria receive reimbursement for petrol.

-While the volunteer population is ageing and we struggle with a shortage, most providers rated their reliability at 9/10

Some broad themes and key findings

-Recruitment and retention of volunteers. Clearly we need a volunteer recruitment and retention program across the State.
We like to work with DHS in developing one.

-Many providers do not have software capable of producing labels in line with the new labelling laws.
An urgent issue. This should be a major project between MV and DHS.

-Consistency and standards across services.
There is a need to develop standards, procedures or best practice models to do with emergency response, temp. testing, client feedback, client information booklets, to name but a few.
Eliminating inconsistencies is vital for legal / duty of care issues. *Again we'd like to work with DHS on these issues.*

-Many providers do not have enough funds to provide training in key areas for volunteers.

-Responses to this survey indicate volunteers are not exactly keen on attended training sessions.

-Maybe we should work with this reality

-Decide, as a sector, what they REALLY need to know and develop some simple, user friendly training packages specific to meals on wheels volunteers.

We'd like to work together with DHS to produce some educational information packages for the sector.

It must be stressed, that in ALL these areas I've just mentioned, a lot of the work has been done.

There are numerous examples of best practice in ALL these areas (booklets, videos, procedures), its about bringing it all together and developing some consistency.

Functionality Of Meals Victoria

This brings me to the functionality of Meals Victoria. When I was president I'd often received calls from people who were surprised they've got through to the President. Like they've been lucky to have got right to top, as though I'm sitting in my huge office, behind my huge oak desk at HQ in Collins St, when in fact I'm tearing my hair out that meat order is late, the fridge is on the blink and a client has given me a piece of her mind about the carrots not being cooked enough ... again.

This project was huge, but it's worth noting that I've estimated it taken up to 50% of my (and I'm sure Mabel's) working time some weeks in recent months. This is not sustainable and not fair on the organisations and other staff within those organisations. To get real traction on some of the key issues to emerge from the survey and the initiatives I've mentioned, this time/money resource issue needs to be addressed. Whether this means funding some part time staff for Meals Victoria, or coming to some agreement with the MAV and Local Government about funding positions directly via Council's.

NOTE- When we discussed raising fees, some rural providers, being so cash strapped, said they could not afford it .

Social Importance of Meals On Wheels

Meals On Wheels is not just about nutrition, its social and social welfare role cannot be underestimated.

Sometimes people in their final years of living at home, their final years of precious independence, don't want help, why would they? They are used to being independent. Sometimes the only thing they'll agree to in terms of help is a meal. And all meals providers know, that this meal is very often the difference between this fragile independence and going into care.

Every day drivers feedback concerns they have about clients. This often leads to follow up by office staff and assessment officers. This follow-up not only very often saves lives, early intervention, in some cases can be the difference between having to go into care (a cost of over \$40,000 a year) or many more productive years of living independently in their own home.

This is why those working within the sector are some of the most committed and hard working people I've had the pleasure of knowing. On behalf of the Meals Victoria Committee I'd like to thank all the providers that participated in this project.

This survey provides a voice for those in the sector, the tables and data are brought to life by their comments. It also provides some bedrock data for planning and for establishing some best practice initiatives for the future.

Note- The entire Meals Victoria Provider Survey will be available on line from next week on the Meals Victoria Website at www.mealsvictoria.org.au