

MOW Provider Service Network
Meeting Summary
15 May 2025 at 1:30 pm

Attendees: Arvind Mohandoss (JW MacIntosh), Nathalie Bazinet (Eastern Ottawa Resource Centre), Kate Tysick (Community Home Support Lanark County), Madison Tyson (Haliburton Highlands Health Services), Gilda Cohen (Jewish Family Services, Ottawa), Sheri Birney (Community Care Northumberland), Laurie Hazen, (Eganville Seniors), Melissa Seguin (Services Communautaire Prescott-Russell), Julie Cardle (Community Care Durham), Brenda Twaddle (Community Care Peterborough), Shell Lee Wert (Community Care South Hastings), Tessa Breen (Community Care Central Hastings), Phyllis Burtenshaw-Lalonde (Maxville Manor), Erica M. Lancia Simmonds Abiola and Angela Robinson (VON), Chris Cobus and Reem Haddad (CSS Shared Resources, Ontario East).

Guests from Apetito: Declan Henderson & Tracy Litmola.

1. Welcome and Introductions

Chris Cobus extended welcoming remarks acknowledging that neither of the Co-Chairs were able to attend today, so she would be filling in as the meeting chair. Participants were invited to introduce themselves and their agency in the chat, to enable sufficient time to cover the agenda planned. Chris welcomed guests: Declan Henderson and Tracy Litmola from Apetito and then handed the floor over to Declan to proceed with a presentation and Q & A session with the group.

2. Presentation/Engagement with Apetito

Declan introduced himself and encouraged Tracey to do the same. He began by thanking the group for this opportunity to discuss some of Apetito's new offerings and updates re: menu and website, acknowledging the company's efforts to make changes based on customer feedback and their commitment to enhance customer services for all involved.

Some of the new offerings include a *menu refresh* improving some old favourites (like tuna pasta casserole/fish & chips) and introducing some more contemporary foods of interest to consumers, such as halal meals, shrimp dinners, cheese perogies, and sweet and sour tofu. Containers are made of a new material (plastic that is made from recycled materials and able to be recycled again) and works better in oven and microwave, as well as separating meal components better than before, with larger font on cooking instructions as requested by consumers. The new 'larger font and colourful' menus should be available to MOW providers in June as new products should be online for July. There is to be no increase in costs related to these changes.

Q & A summary:

- How might proposed tariffs impact on current purchasing arrangements/food costs?
Apetito remains mostly unaffected re: tariff concerns thus far, as it is a Canadian

company and they source food products locally as much as possible with their head office in Ottawa.

- Will consideration be given to expanding the diversity of meals offered? (e.g., low Fodmap meals, ethnocultural foods, gluten free, and low sodium, vegetarian options). They are currently doing so based on recent customer feedback.
- Is there opportunity to revamp the website with customer feedback, to ease navigation and ordering processes? Changes made to ease the ordering process. Welcome further feedback at anytime if further adjustments needed.
- Can the cost of freight be more clearly itemized on the invoice? Explained how their calculation of freight costs fluctuates based on weigh of the order and fuel costs re: distance travelled. Welcomed further clarification if there are more 'agency specific' details needing clarification.
- Can we plan together re: how best to deal with recalls, i.e., clarify expectations re: notification, knowing we all have a role to play in responding to these situations to keep clients safe? For sure. Apetito to provide their internal policy/process in responding to recalls, so providers know what to expect when recalls occur.
- Is there an easier way to identify meals that are 'safe' for people with various allergies e.g., allergic to garlic, mushrooms, or onions? Current reference to 'Nutri-data' means reviewing all ingredients one meal at a time, when these allergies arise. Apetito currently working on a 'reverse search' for their inventory of meals, so that customers can more easily determine if a given meal choice is free of the ingredient they are unable to eat. Should be available later this year.
- Can we plan together the time to consider changes to meal costs, so that they align with both Apetito and CSS fiscal planning schedules? E.g., CSS are usually budgeting for their next fiscal year in January. Apetito currently review their costs in September. Will give this request further consideration.
- There appears to be variance in contracts across the sector. While some agencies may want to enter into a contract, and others may not, most would prefer not to be limited to purchasing meals exclusively from Apetito. As nonprofits, CSS have an obligation to do their best to keep meal costs for clients affordable and ensure client receive quality products in response to their changing needs. How might we work together to ensure affordability and client satisfaction? Apetito will continue to be flexible re: customers who do or do not wish to enter into a contract to receive product. It is not essential to have a contract to receive product. Plan to be more engaged with customers/clients re: their ongoing satisfaction and needs.
- Contact emails: Declan Henderson (Commercial Manager, Healthcare) declan.henderson@apetito.ca Tracy Litmola (Customer Service) tracy.litmola@apetito.ca

3.&4. Acceptance of today's agenda and last meeting notes (20 Mar 2025)

Both were accepted as circulated.

5. Update on Taste Testing events with Sunita Goel owner of "Ageless Eats Kitchen"

May 1, 2025 event in Ottawa a success. Contact: Meredith [Woods for details: meredith@mealsonwheels-ottawa.org](mailto:meredith@mealsonwheels-ottawa.org) .

Chris sent Sunita a “Thank you” on behalf of the group, for her willingness to travel to various sub-regions of OHE to provide taste testing events.

6. MOW Research underway

Please see below information shared with OCSA members from Dr. Yukari Seko, Associate Professor at Toronto Metropolitan University.

Dr. Seko's team is doing a study **Mapping Culinary Diversity: Understanding Cultural Meal Provision in Ontario's Meals on Wheels Services**.

This study looks at how culturally appropriate food supports the well-being of older adults, especially those from ethnocultural minority backgrounds. They are exploring the extent to which Meals on Wheels programs in Ontario offer cultural meals to their service users.

Who can take part in the study?

- A MOW coordinator/supervisor at a not-for-profit organization in Ontario
- The organization must receive government funding to provide MoW
- You will be compensated \$40 for your participation

Participants will be asked to fill an online survey which will take approximately 30 minutes.

The survey is available at this link: <https://forms.gle/ZX9gFdtX4f1RfWb8>

For more information read this [information letter](#).

7. Agency Highlights

None reported at this time.

8. Topics for the next MOW meeting in June

- **Launch of the Meal Delivery OHE Best Practice Guidelines**

A meeting in June was not warranted at this time. **Action:** Chris to circulate **MOW OHE Best Practice Guidelines** to the group by email and post on the www.accesscss.ca website when finalized and reconvene meetings in the fall.

9. Next Meeting

September 2025. **Series of meeting invites to be circulated for Sept 2025 – March 2026.**

10. Other

Apples to Apples project update – Chris acknowledged that work on this project was extensive, involving the collection of data on the full scope of CSS services funded by Ontario Health and offered across the Ontario Health region. Work will continue throughout the next several months, as interviews are scheduled with CSS Providers across the region. Aggregated results are anticipated to be available to present back to regional service networks in the fall. Each regional service network will then have opportunity to determine their next steps/areas of focus based upon variances and commonalities identified across the region and across services.