

Meals on Wheels UK – Provider Resource



Developed by the Meals on Wheels UK project, University of Bristol

How to make it easy to refer someone to Meals on Wheels

Why this matters

Many people who could benefit from Meals on Wheels are identified by health and social care professionals, including social workers, GPs, hospital discharge teams, and community organisations.

However, referrals are not always straightforward. In some areas, there are:

- no clear referral pathways
- limited awareness of services
- uncertainty about who is eligible

This can delay access to support.

Based on research and provider experience, this guide outlines simple ways providers can make it easier for professionals to refer people to Meals on Wheels.

1. Make referral pathways clear

Ensure your website clearly explains:

- who can refer (self, family, professionals)
- how to refer (phone, email, online form)
- what information is needed
- how quickly the service can start

Tip: A simple 'Refer someone' button or page on your website could make a big difference.

2. Provide clear contact routes for professionals

Include:

- a direct phone number
- a monitored email address
- response times
- who professionals should contact

Tip: Professionals often need quick decisions - delays can result in missed referrals.

3. Explain who is likely to benefit

Professionals may not always know who Meals on Wheels is for.

Provide simple guidance, such as:

People who:

- struggle to prepare meals
- live alone without support
- are recovering from illness or hospital discharge
- are at risk of poor nutrition

4. Use simple referral criteria (where possible)

Some providers choose to share simple criteria or guidance.

You may wish to:

- outline key indicators
- describe typical characteristics of people who use your service
- explain flexibility

5. Consider using a referral checklist

A structured checklist can support consistent and confident referrals.

The Meals on Wheels UK project has developed a simple referral checklist to support professionals in identifying individuals likely to benefit from the service.

The referral checklist is a University of Bristol licensed resource and can be downloaded free of charge [here](#).

This checklist:

- supports (but does not replace) professional judgement
- is based on demographic and health-related indicators
- can be used across health and social care settings

6. Build relationships with local professionals

Referrals often depend on awareness and trust.

You may wish to:

- connect with local social care teams

- engage with hospital discharge staff
 - attend local meetings or networks
 - provide short presentations or information
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7. Make information easy to share

Professionals often pass information on to families.

Provide:

- a clear webpage link
 - downloadable information
 - simple summaries of your service
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8. Be clear about availability and capacity

Where possible, explain:

- whether you are currently accepting referrals
- waiting times
- delivery coverage

This helps professionals make appropriate decisions.

Based on research and provider experience

Research has shown that people benefit most when access to Meals on Wheels is timely and straightforward. Clear referral pathways and accessible information can help ensure that individuals receive support when they need it.

Help us improve this resource

This guide has been developed based on research and ongoing engagement with Meals on Wheels providers, service users, and professionals who refer people to the service.

We know that referral pathways vary widely across the UK, and that many providers have developed practical and effective ways of working locally.

We would really value your input to help keep this resource relevant and grounded in real-world practice.

If you work with health and care professionals to enhance referrals to your service, we would be very interested to hear from you.

You might wish to share:

- how professionals currently refer to your service
- any changes you've made to simplify the process
- examples of what has worked well locally
- any challenges you've encountered

Please share your ideas via our [WhatsApp Community](#).

Your input will help us continue to develop practical, provider-informed resources for the sector.