

# Could Your Hospital Benefit from External Dining Operations?

Discover How Alternatives to Traditional Dining Operations Can Lower Cost and Increase Patient Satisfaction



As healthcare costs continue to rise, and hospitals fall short of reducing their overhead costs, more and more hospitals are closing nationwide. According to a recent study by Navigant, 21 percent of U.S. rural hospitals are at a high risk of closing unless their financial situations improve. The hospitals that fail will join 163 hospitals that have already closed across the country since 2005. To ensure that your hospital doesn't get brought into that statistic, employing external expertise, could be your solution to lowering cost structures.

The problem with traditional outsourcing models is that they tend to shift control over to the company they're using, which compromises who has ownership of what, decreasing transparency. Whereas, non-traditional contract models are inclined to leverage the expertise of a partner that integrates into a hospital's culture and operational strategies. This modern approach gives your hospital the control you need while utilizing experts that can remain transparent to give your hospital a direct line of sight into operations.

Has your hospital thought much about dining? Food and nutrition services are typically viewed as a cost center, but if looked at differently, it can be an area of opportunity for your hospital that operates as a cost-saver. When a hospital begins using an external dining service for patients, the operation works as a fixed cost that can reduce your overhead expenses—while your dining partner manages recruitment and training top culinary talent, costs, reducing waste, and ensuring your hospital receives the highest quality food at the best price.

The first step is to employ funding strategies that will improve and modernize your hospital's dining services. Here are five ways a dining-management provider can work to fund your dining operations efficiently:

1. **Fully-funded capital improvement** – Hospitals rarely allocate capital improvement dollars to the dining department, preferring to spend money on areas that bring inpatient revenue. As a result, dining facilities are often in desperate need of capital investment. You must choose a company that can properly evaluate how much capital your hospital needs for renovations and improvements to control your cost and drive innovation.
2. **Increase in retail sales revenue** – People want to buy delicious, reasonably-priced food, and that goes beyond patients, including hospital employees, friends and family visiting patients, and anyone from your community who wants to enjoy a good meal. An increase in participation creates a community for patients and guests through outreach and promotions.
3. **Lowering food costs** – Dining-management companies can lower costs by leveraging their relationships with a network of top suppliers to get volume pricing that meets your hospitals' needs. Another way to lower food costs is an investment in fresh ingredients. When kitchens are preparing food from scratch, the sum of ingredients costs less because you're eliminating manufacturer overhead. So, because a hospital is already paying chefs to cook, there is no additional cost. The cost of from-scratch entrées typically costs 30-40 percent less, which is why a scratch-dining program will yield cost savings that help your hospital with financial challenges.
4. **Staff Enhancements** – Your dining partner, should have a proven track record of evaluating workforce productivity that you can use to allocate team members in a way that uncovers operational efficiencies and achieve a higher level of service without adding unnecessary headcount.
5. **Performance Accountability** – Operating with a more efficient labor model will reduce your overall cost and hold your partnership accountable by outlining performance metrics that must be met or exceeded through a risk-reward agreement.

**Positioning your dietary operation as an intricate component of your community health and wellness population can highlight your mission as an organization and emphasize your dedication to patients' health—as the quality of food and its' delivery is an essential contribution to the healing process. A dining partnership gives your hospital access to industry expert dietitians and culinarians to craft food menus that cover special diets and clinical nutrition needs. By working with subject matter experts that are well-versed in today's health and wellness trends and that follow best practices within dining operations, your food is more likely to improve in ways that patients want and need.**



These improvements work to benefit your entire community of patients, visitors, staff, and their perception of your hospital. Here are five ways the community is impacted:

1. **Offloads management of dining operations** – While a hospital’s core mission falls on patient care, the focus of a dining-management company is solely on dining. When you shift the dining responsibilities to the experts, your hospital can focus on your patients without distractions.
2. **Builds loyalty and community engagement** – With improved dining, visitors are more likely to visit your hospital cafes regularly—and be reminded that your hospital should be the first choice when they or their loved ones need medical care. A community hospital, Citizens Medical Center saw an immediate impact when they began outsourcing their food services. Their CEO Mike Olson commented:

“We’re now seeing people in our cafeteria we didn’t see before, like community groups and even doctors from other hospitals coming to try our food.”

[Learn more](#) about how this hospital chose to redefine patient care.

3. **A happier, healthier workforce** – Access to healthy, tasty meals and snacks boosts employee satisfaction and morale, drives up productivity, and promotes a healthy lifestyle. Great food can also help influence caregiver recruiting and retention—and even influence physician decisions about which hospital they send patients.
4. **Saves time for busy nurses** – When the responsibility for patient dining falls on your dining partner, nurses save time to focus more on patient care. Your provider should be monitoring each patient after delivering meals to make sure they get the nutrition they need so that they can report any concerns to the clinical team.
5. **Higher patient satisfaction scores** – Patients remember delicious food, prepared the way they want it while meeting their dietary and religious requirements. By bringing variety, freshness, and a more personal touch to patient dining, patient satisfaction scores will increase.



Dining management companies, like Unidine, are experts at delivering a dining experience that works to benefit patients’ overall health.

Every hospital is unique; therefore, your dining solution needs to align with the specific needs of your culture and clientele. Explore how this [company](#) is responding with a **one-size-fits-one approach**, with a lens that goes far beyond peripheral vision to look at everything: population health and wellness, the well-being of employees, admissions, educating families, driving cost out and increasing participation.