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Submission on the Aged Care Bill 2024

Response by the Maggie Beer Foundation to the Inquiry by the Community Affairs Legislation Committee

About the Maggie Beer Foundation

The Maggie Beer Foundation is determined to improve the food experience and quality of life for current and future generations of older people.

For more than 10 years, the Foundation has been advocating, educating, collaborating, facilitating research and sharing the latest knowledge and skills with cooks and chefs in aged care. We do this through our online education modules, our professional hands-on Trainer Mentor Chef Programs, our moderation of a professional community for aged care cooks and chefs, and our contribution to research and policy development.

We can bring about life-altering change to the well-being of older people through access to food full of flavour and nutrients.

As Maggie says,

“Food is the fuel of life, of great conversation and memorable meals. Its substance is far more than just the nutrients acquired in the act of eating. It’s the knowledge of loving preparation, the anticipation of sharing a meal and the delicious pleasure of engaging all our senses as we eat. Food is nutrition not just for the body, but also for the soul. It’s what fires our appetite for life, no matter what age. Every mouthful counts as we age and the Foundation’s resources and reach aspire to work every day to make good food and good eating the reality for each and every older Australian.”

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Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Community Affairs
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
community.affairs.sen@aph.gov.au

The Secretary

Re - Aged Care Bill 2024 - Submission from the Maggie Beer Foundation

The Maggie Beer Foundation urges the passage of the Aged Care Bill 2024 in this Parliamentary Session.

We support the current drafting and, notwithstanding that there will be pressure to continue to develop it, we believe it provides the required substantial overhaul of the legislative basis for our aged care system in Australia.

We also note the important agreement about funding arrangements reached between the Government and Opposition. This bipartisanship augurs well for the Aged Care Bill 2024 and its capacity for a fundamental reset in the way we frame, fund, deliver and regulate aged care.

The work of the Maggie Beer Foundation is focused on how the food and nutrition needs of older Australians are met.

The risk of malnutrition is very real both for people living in residential aged care and for those receiving aged care at home. While the Royal Commission into Aged Care Safety and Quality nominated food as an urgent priority to “fix” in Australian residential aged care, malnutrition is also a major risk for many older people living in their own homes. It is very often a key trigger behind the need for older people to move to residential aged care.

We acknowledge the work of previous and current Health and Aged Care Ministers and the steps each has taken to prioritise food, dining and nutrition at least in residential aged care. We note for example the explicit inclusion of food in funding accountability, and the ACQSC’s new Food, Nutrition and Dining Hotline.

For the residents of aged care, current federal government funding of the Maggie Beer Foundation Trainer Mentor Program has provided the first ever specialised training for aged care cooks, chefs and kitchen teams.

We look forward to this funding being extended and increased well before its current expiry in 2026 so that the cooks and chefs have access to the training expected of aged care workers who can deliver high quality care under 20(c) (xi) of the draft Bill.



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Clause 15 - Strengthened Standards

The Bill heralds strengthened standards. We are very pleased that Clause 15(1) and (2) enable rules that prescribe standards of aged care including “(e) how registered providers must deliver food and drink to meet the nutritional needs and preferences of individuals”.

The Maggie Beer Foundation has been very involved in the drafting of a new Standard 6 titled *Food and Nutrition* in anticipation of the passage of the Bill ready for operation by July 2025. Educating and monitoring of this new, significantly better and much more comprehensive Standard (notwithstanding that it applies only to residential aged care at this stage) is awaiting passage of the Bill.

Clause 20 - Meaning of high quality care

Clause 20 provides definition to high quality care. Given the risk of malnutrition for people receiving aged care both in their own home and in residential care, we think that adding “enabling access to tasty and nutritious food where the person relies on their aged care provider for this” would ensure that food is seen as an integral part of aged care for many people.

Clause 601 - Review

We support the opportunity to review the Act in 5 years provided for in Clause 601. The new Act will not be perfect and it is inevitable that opportunities to improve its provisions and implementation will emerge over time.

We flag for example that this review will need to consider reform in two areas in particular –

1. Food for people living at home

Malnutrition is a major risk for frail older people living in their own homes, very often triggering their move to residential aged care. The draft *Standard 6 Food and Nutrition* applies only to residential aged care and it is well and truly time for us to turn our attention to older people getting aged care in their homes.

While nothing in the Bill stops this focus in the future, we will be urging the new Support at Home program, along with arrangements made for Commonwealth Home Support Program services, to make a much more comprehensive contribution to reducing the risk of malnutrition for older people living at home, including and especially those living alone.

2. Minimum qualifications for cooks and chefs in residential aged care

Food is not incidental to the lives, wellbeing and happiness of older Australians. We do not currently have a sufficient workforce of trained cooks and chefs with specialist knowledge of aged care. There is no formal qualification available.

We need cooks and chefs who are able to combine knowledge of food science, skills in kitchen management and food preparation, an ability to present food and a talent for flavour to also be able to meet the diverse tastes, needs and preferences of older Australians on a 24/7 basis.

An important part of closing this training gap will be to address the education needs and the career opportunities for the people who take responsibility every day for the food and dining experience in aged care.



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Despite residential aged care homes offering the most complex cooking and hospitality roles for cooks and chefs anywhere in Australia, there is no relevant accredited tertiary qualification on offer.

The Maggie Beer Foundation has been working to address this gap both through our Trainer Mentor Program and our other bespoke training and through our advocacy work with the vocational education and skills sector to identify and develop future accredited qualifications.

We would like to see the introduction of mandatory minimum qualifications for our residential aged care cooks and chefs right now. However we are very aware that there is not yet a relevant vocational qualification that combines commercial cooking with the unique needs of aged care residents. The Maggie Beer Foundation Trainer Mentor Program, as the only specialised training available currently, will require an extension to its funding beyond 2026 to reach our 2700 Australian aged care homes.

We therefore give notice that it is our expectation that a mandatory minimum training/qualification for cooks and chefs in aged care will be considered in the 5 year review of the Act.

We thank the Committee for its scrutiny of such an important Bill. The Foundation believes that it will uplift aged care. While there are no doubt improvements that could be made, it is a very good Bill making important progress in the shortcomings of aged care laid bare by the Royal Commission.

We urge the Committee to recommend the passage of the Aged Care Bill 2024 by this parliament.

Yours sincerely

Maggie Beer AO
Founder and Director

Jane Mussared
Chief Executive Officer