

Food Satisfaction of Residents, Families and Staff of Aged Care Homes:

A Nation-Wide Survey



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PROJECT BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY

Members of the Flinders University Aged Care Food and Nutrition Research Team ('project team') were commissioned by the Maggie Beer Foundation to conduct a nationwide survey to determine the food satisfaction of residents, their families and staff in residential aged care homes across Australia, using the Flinders University Food Service Satisfaction Questionnaires⁽¹⁾⁽²⁾⁽³⁾.

This nationwide survey was promoted to all residential aged care homes in Australia (n=2700), by the Maggie Beer Foundation and the Department of Health in July 2023 and periodically thereafter. Expressions of interest were collated and forwarded to the project team each week from 8th August 2023. The project team supplied registrants with unique electronic links to each questionnaire hosted on Qualtrics, or PDF copies where requested, between 8 August 2023 and 31 December 2023. To support participation in this project, the project team provided sites with a User Manual and access to online training materials designed to support quality administration of the Flinders University Food Service Satisfaction Questionnaires. Upon confirmation from participating sites of a date suitable to close the questionnaire links and proceed to analysis, or confirmation that the site was unable to commit to participation by the 31 December 2023 deadline, the links were closed. The project team then commenced data analysis and preparation of site-specific reports, which were sent to participating aged care homes and the Maggie Beer Foundation. The timeline of activity associated with the project can be seen in **Figure 1**.

In addition to supporting sites in administering the questionnaires, the project team met with the Maggie Beer Foundation team monthly to provide updates on participation. The project team also provided online training and support for Foundation staff regarding the development and administration of the Flinders University Food Service Satisfaction Questionnaires, and how to interpret and respond to frequently asked questions relating to summary data, specifically data generated from administration to the residents.



Timeline of Activity Associated with Project



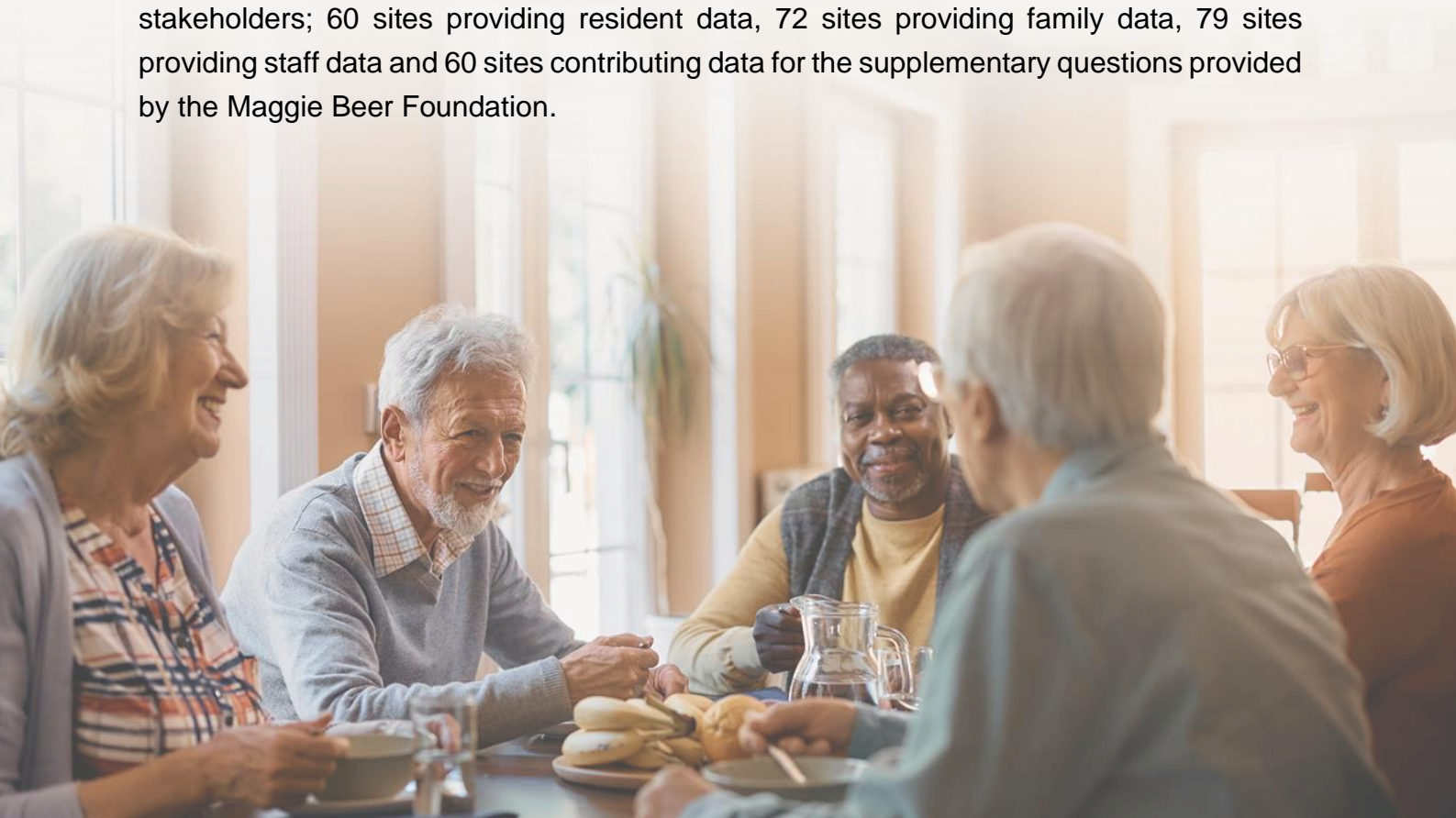
Figure 1: Project timeline.

Collectively, 568 links were sent to aged care homes that had expressed an interest in participating, and registrations were received from New South Wales (n=165), Victoria (n=152), Queensland (n=111), Western Australia (n=67), South Australia (n=52), Tasmania (n=17) and the Northern Territory (n=4). No registrations were received from the Australian Capital Territory. It is important to note that for each of the registrants, completing the food satisfaction questionnaires was optional, not mandatory.

Each registrant was followed up via email approximately four weeks after the initial communication to advise the number of stakeholder responses they had received; at this time, they were provided with strategies and tools to help promote the questionnaires to stakeholders.

In addition to receiving regular updates containing new registrations, the first two waves of Trainer Mentor Program (TMP) registrations were received from the Maggie Beer Foundation on 28th November 2023 and 21st February 2024, respectively. Completing the food satisfaction questionnaires was a mandatory component of the TMP, with cutoffs and reporting due dates provided to the project team by the Maggie Beer Foundation. As with the other registrations, unique links and reminder emails were sent to TMP sites to facilitate adherence to the timeline provided by the Maggie Beer Foundation.

Of the 568 links generated, 59 sites activated their link but did not have valid responses, 29 sites withdrew from the project, 408 sites did not activate or click through the questionnaires and 85 sites administered the questionnaires to some or all of their stakeholders; 60 sites providing resident data, 72 sites providing family data, 79 sites providing staff data and 60 sites contributing data for the supplementary questions provided by the Maggie Beer Foundation.



Data were downloaded from Qualtrics and analysed in SPSS (Version 28.0.1.1). Following data analysis, result reports, shown in **Figure 2**, were sent to sites and the Maggie Beer Foundation outlining the overall level of satisfaction, satisfaction by domain and the three lowest performing items as determined by each stakeholder group.

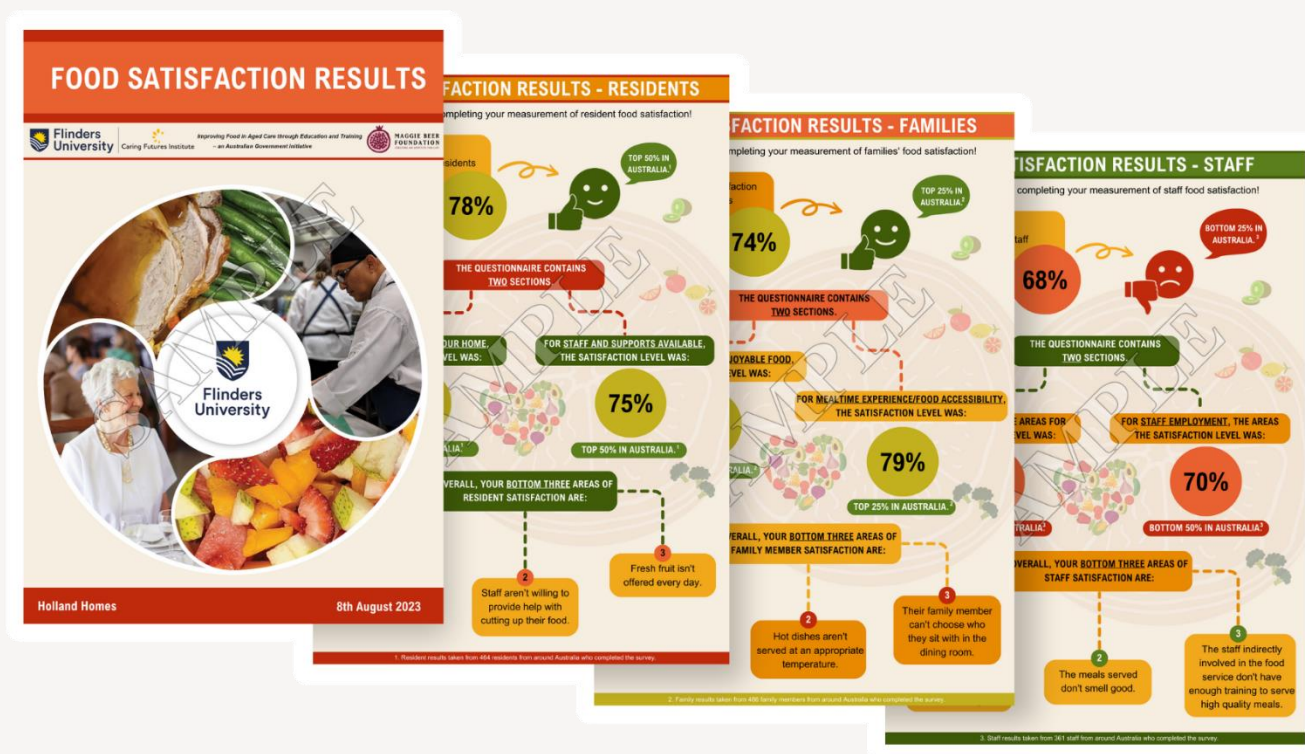


Figure 2: Example of the result reports sent to participating sites upon completion.

This report provides the following data:

- Resident Food Satisfaction – total; by domain for national, state and site.
- Family and Staff Satisfaction – total; by domain for national and state.
- Supplementary Data, questions supplied by the Maggie Beer Foundation.



PROJECT OUTCOMES

RESIDENT FOOD SATISFACTION

This questionnaire asks residents how satisfied they are with the food and dining experience in their current aged care home. The resident questionnaire, an excerpt of which can be seen in **Figure 3**, has been designed to be administered by a staff member or volunteer, as this can help overcome barriers that may prevent some residents from completing a questionnaire independently.

Residents were asked to provide some basic demographic data (age, gender, ethnicity, etc.) however no identifying information was requested. The questionnaire contains 25 core items that form two domains: section one has questions related to the food served whereas section two has questions relating to staff and supports⁽¹⁾.

In addition to the items on the resident questionnaire, the Maggie Beer Foundation nominated eight supplementary questions which were administered using a response scale from none of the time to all of the time.

The sample included 1159 residents of 60 aged care homes. Of the 1147/1159 residents that responded to the question regarding gender: 742 identified as female (64.7%), 397 identified as male (34.6%) and eight individuals (0.7%) preferred not to say.

Residents were aged 30-105 years old with a median age of 86 years. Most residents (73.4%) were born in Australia with 2.8% identifying as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. Where residents indicated they had been born overseas, the most common countries of origin were the UK/Ireland (6%), Italy (2%), Russia (0.9%), Germany (0.8%) and New Zealand (0.7%). For those born overseas most (91%) have been living in Australia for 20 years or more.



The image shows a screenshot of a questionnaire titled 'Thinking about the food here...'. It includes a header with logos for Flinders University, Caring Futures Institute, and Maggie Beer Foundation. The questionnaire is organized into a table with columns for 'Questions' and 'Answers (tick the most appropriate)'. The answer options are: 'None of the time', 'Some of the time', 'Most of the time', 'All of the time', and 'Unsure/not applicable'. The questions listed are:

- Do you have a choice in what to eat at mealtimes?
- Are you satisfied with the temperature of meals served?
- Are you offered fresh fruit every day?
- Are you offered vegetables every day?
- Are you served foods that you like?
- Do you receive familiar foods that you can recognise?
- Do you receive a variety of foods every day?
- Do the meals taste like they are freshly cooked?
- Do you receive foods that taste good to you?
- Do you receive foods that look appetising to you?
- If you are not satisfied with the meal(s) provided, are you able to choose an alternative?
- Does your meal arrive quickly after you have been seated in the dining room?
- Are you able to leave the dining room soon after you have finished your meal?
- Are you able to invite family or friends to eat with you at mealtimes?
- Can you help yourself to food whenever you feel hungry?

Figure 3: Excerpt from the Resident Food Satisfaction Questionnaire.

The state/territory and national overall summary score together with the score by domain for Resident Food Satisfaction is provided in **Table 1**. Additionally, the results for each state have been included for New South Wales (**Table 2**), Queensland (**Table 3**), South Australia (**Table 4**), Tasmania (**Table 5**), Victoria (**Table 6**) and Western Australia (**Table 7**). The three lowest performing items across each aged care home were tallied in **Graph 1** to demonstrate the items that are commonly underperforming. Lastly, the results for the eight additional questions nominated by the Maggie Beer Foundation have been displayed in **Table 8**.

The project team have also established National benchmarks to aid in further interpretation, which are located on page 20 of this report.

Table 1: State/Territory and National Resident Food Satisfaction Score by Participant (n=1159).

State/Territory		Participants	Overall	Section 1 Food Served	Section 2 Staff & Supports
NSW	23 sites	489	64%	70%	55%
QLD	7 sites	109	76%	78%	71%
SA	6 sites	102	62%	65%	57%
TAS	1 site	12	94%	96%	90%
VIC	20 sites	380	69%	71%	66%
WA	3 sites	67	64%	68%	59%
National	60 sites	1159	67%	71%	60%



Table 2: New South Wales Resident Food Satisfaction Score by Site (n=23).

Site	Participants	Overall	Section 1 Food Served	Section 2 Staff & Supports
2011	5	43%	46%	37%
2040	39	57%	65%	46%
2053	18	57%	64%	48%
2069	26	60%	60%	59%
2076	6	74%	76%	71%
2077	9	65%	78%	87%
2082	39	64%	71%	52%
2122	17	93%	91%	97%
2136	2	80%	90%	65%
2230	33	72%	81%	59%
2233	13	57%	57%	56%
2258	15	60%	65%	52%
2260	22	74%	74%	75%
2261	30	66%	77%	50%
2262	7	66%	74%	53%
2263	26	62%	64%	59%
2264	5	84%	86%	80%
2335	37	46%	54%	35%
2455	1	83%	80%	88%
2465	2	61%	61%	60%
2525	82	64%	71%	55%
2527	25	58%	60%	55%
2535	30	70%	72%	67%
Range	1 - 82	43% - 93%	46% - 91%	35% - 97%

Table 3: Queensland Resident Food Satisfaction by Site (n=7).

Site	Participants	Overall	Section 1 Food Served	Section 2 Staff & Supports
2071	35	71%	73%	68%
2089	2	75%	76%	73%
2094	21	73%	78%	66%
2256	29	77%	83%	69%
2267	5	89%	88%	90%
2456	2	69%	76%	60%
2537	15	80%	79%	81%
Range	2 - 35	69% - 89%	73% - 88%	60% - 90%

Table 4: South Australia Resident Food Satisfaction by Site (n=6).

Site	Participants	Overall	Section 1 Food Served	Section 2 Staff & Supports
2073	11	87%	83%	93%
2106	8	68%	71%	64%
2283	6	49%	48%	50%
2349	9	63%	69%	52%
2359	30	57%	59%	54%
2526	38	61%	65%	54%
Range	6 - 38	49% - 87%	48% - 83%	50% - 93%

Table 5: Tasmania Resident Food Satisfaction by Site (n=1).

Site	Participants	Overall	Section 1 Food Served	Section 2 Staff & Supports
2245	12	94%	96%	90%

Table 6: Victoria Resident Food Satisfaction by Site (n=20).

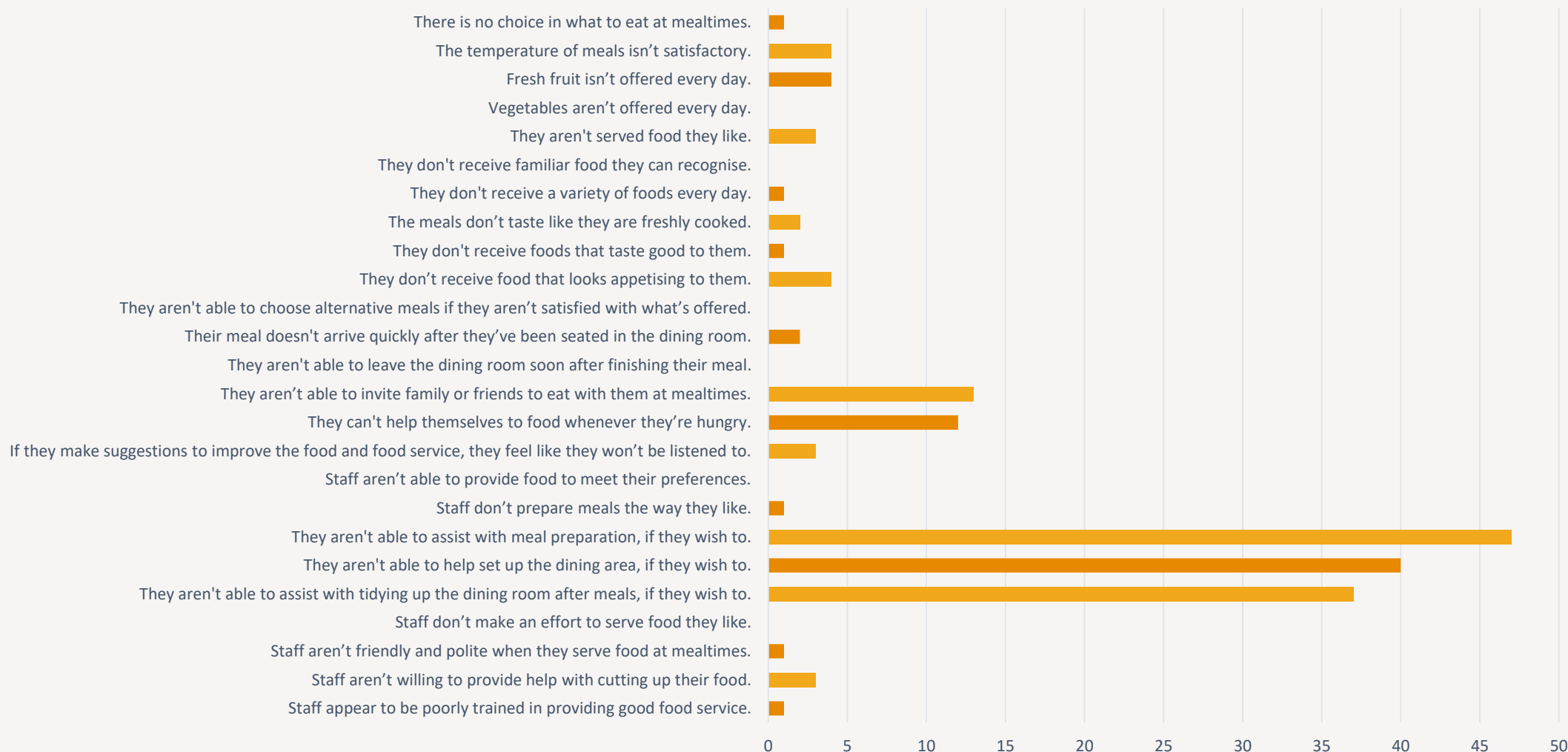
Site	Participants	Overall	Section 1 Food Served	Section 2 Staff & Supports
1005	2	83%	86%	78%
1009	19	67%	72%	58%
2004	38	81%	79%	83%
2032	16	67%	73%	58%
2034	2	72%	81%	58%
2093	36	66%	68%	65%
2114	20	72%	74%	68%
2231	22	87%	88%	84%
2241	10	69%	77%	57%
2251	25	58%	62%	51%
2297	8	77%	81%	70%
2299	12	74%	80%	65%
2301	11	81%	81%	79%
2449	24	56%	58%	53%
2454	4	72%	80%	60%
2457	11	80%	81%	79%
2460	15	81%	87%	71%
2475	56	69%	73%	63%
2489	14	76%	79%	72%
2541	35	40%	38%	36%
Range	2 - 56	40% - 87%	38% - 88%	36% - 84%

Table 7: Western Australia Resident Food Satisfaction by Site (n=3).

Site	Participants	Overall	Section 1 Food Served	Section 2 Staff & Supports
2360	54	62%	66%	56%
2102	4	62%	67%	54%
2458	9	81%	82%	78%
Range	4 - 54	62% - 81%	66% - 82%	54% - 78%

Overview of Resident Questionnaire Item Performance in 60 Aged Care Homes

Questionnaire item in order on resident questionnaire



How often each questionnaire item appeared within the bottom three performing items

Graph 1: Breakdown of how often each item appears within the bottom three performing items for all 60 resident questionnaires.

Table 8: Maggie Beer Foundation Questions Relating to Resident Food Satisfaction.

Question	None of the time	Some of the time	Most of the time	All of the time
Are the meals you are served a texture that you like?	5%	16%	42%	36%
Are you able to eat your meal at your own pace?	1%	5%	15%	79%
Do you enjoy the flavour of the meals you are served?	5%	18%	42%	36%
Do you have any special dietary requirements?	59%	7%	9%	25%
Do you require any modifications to the texture of your meals?	66%	10%	9%	15%
If you do require modifications to the texture of your meals are you offered meals that are suitable?	40%	10%	19%	31%
Are the staff able to describe what you are being served?	7%	17%	31%	45%
Are you able to identify what you are being served?	3%	11%	35%	50%



FAMILY FOOD SATISFACTION

This questionnaire asks family members of residents how satisfied they are with various aspects of the meal and dining experience in the home where their loved one resides. Family members were asked to provide some basic demographic data about themselves as well as the relevant resident (gender, age, ethnicity, etc.). The questionnaire contains 24 core items that form two domains: section one has questions related to the provision of enjoyable food and section two has questions relating to the mealtime experience and food accessibility⁽²⁾.

The sample included 752 family members of residents of 72 aged care homes. Of the 748/752 family members that responded to the question regarding gender: 555 identified as female (74%), 186 identified as male (25%), and seven individuals (1%) preferred not to say. Most family members identified as aged 51-60 years (29%); 61-70 years (37%) or >71 years (26%). The most common relationships reported by family were that the resident was a parent (62%), spouse (10%) or sibling (4%).

A summary score by domain for Family Food Satisfaction at a state/territory and national level is provided in **Table 9**, and the three lowest performing items across each aged care home were tallied in **Graph 2**.

Table 9: State/Territory and National Family Food Satisfaction
 Score by Participant (n=752).

State/Territory		Participants	Overall	Section 1 Provision of Enjoyable Food	Section 2 Mealtime Experience/ Food Accessibility
NSW	28 sites	354	69%	66%	71%
QLD	9 sites	110	76%	73%	78%
SA	6 sites	51	72%	68%	74%
VIC	24 sites	193	69%	65%	72%
WA	5 sites	44	61%	58%	64%
National	72 sites	752	70%	66%	72%

Overview of Family Questionnaire Item Performance in 72 Aged Care Homes

Questionnaire item in order on questionnaire



How often each questionnaire item appeared within the bottom three performing items

Graph 2: Breakdown of how often each item appears within the bottom three performing items for all 72 family member questionnaires.

STAFF FOOD SATISFACTION

This questionnaire asks staff how satisfied they are with their role in the food service, the quality of the food they are offering, the level of training and training opportunities provided, whether they feel like important contributors to the meals, the dining environment, the reliability of the food service and their relationships with family/residents. Staff were asked to provide some basic demographic data (age, gender, ethnicity etc.) as well as identifying the role they performed in the aged care home. The questionnaire contains 42 items that form two domains: section one has questions relating to the food service and section two has questions relating to their employment⁽³⁾.

The sample included 822 staff from 79 aged care homes. Of the 818/822 that responded to the question regarding gender: 686 identified as female (84%), 116 identified as male (14%) and 13 individuals (2%) preferred not to say. Most staff identified as aged between 25-39 years (33%), 40-54 years (30%) or 55-64 years (22.5%). Just over half the population (53%) indicated they were born in Australia with 41% being born overseas. The most common roles performed by staff were aged care worker/care staff (39%), hospitality or catering staff (25%), nurses (17%) or other roles such as lifestyle coordinator (18%).

A summary score by domain for Staff Food Satisfaction at a state/territory and national level is provided in **Table 10**, and the three lowest performing items across each aged care home were tallied in **Graph 3**.

Table 10: State/Territory Staff Food Satisfaction Score by Participant (n=822).

State/Territory		Participants	Overall	Section 1 Food Service	Section 2 Staff Employment
NSW	30 sites	366	71%	74%	69%
QLD	8 sites	111	77%	79%	75%
SA	6 sites	93	70%	75%	67%
TAS	1 site	16	86%	87%	84%
VIC	28 sites	195	69%	73%	67%
WA	6 sites	41	71%	75%	69%
National	79 sites	822	71%	75%	69%

Overview of Staff Questionnaire Item Performance in 79 Aged Care Homes

Questionnaire item in order on questionnaire



How often each questionnaire item appeared within the bottom three performing items

Graph 3: Breakdown of how often each item appears within the bottom three performing items for all 79 staff questionnaires.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

“

"With grateful hearts, we at [participating aged care home], thank you and acknowledge all the help you have extended to us. We know that your time is precious. God bless you all."

”

For the past decade, The Flinders University Aged Care Food and Nutrition Research Team have worked together to develop three Food Service Satisfaction Questionnaires: one for residents in aged care⁽¹⁾; one for their family members⁽²⁾; and one for use by staff⁽³⁾. Although each of these is unique to their target stakeholder, together they are core components of the Flinders University Food Service

Satisfaction Toolkit, a world-first, evidence-based resource for use by aged care homes. The development of the questionnaires has been informed by comprehensive reviews of literature^(4,5) and rigorous research methods⁽¹⁻³⁾ to strengthen not only their validity and reliability but also their relevance to the residential aged care landscape.

While the questionnaires enable aged care homes to assess their food service from the perspective of three key stakeholders and compare performance over time and against National benchmarks, the Flinders University Toolkit is also supplemented by a comprehensive Evidence-Based Library of simple research-informed tips linked to items within each of the questionnaires. An example of an evidence-based tip is provided in **Figure 4**. The library of tips can be used by aged care homes to strategically target their resources to effect improvements in their food service and therefore improve the satisfaction of residents, their family members and staff.



LOOKS GOOD ENOUGH TO EAT

Presentation of food can change how we feel about our food and even influence how hungry we are. Make your residents' mouths water by putting your best plate forward every time, with plating guides in the kitchen. These can be as simple as a photo menu with clear detail on how the plate should look before exiting the kitchen.

Zellner DA, Siemens E, Teran V, Conroy R, Lankford M, Agrafiotis A, Ambrose L, Locher P. How plating affects liking for the taste of food. *Appetite*. 2011. 57.

Figure 4: Example of a tip from our Evidence-Based Library to address the Resident Questionnaire item: "Do you receive foods that look appetising to you?"

The new Aged Care Act is expected to come into effect on 1 July 2024, subject to being passed in Parliament. Alongside the new Act, the strengthened Aged Care Quality Standards⁽⁶⁾ will be implemented. There is increasing emphasis for aged care homes to actively seek and analyse feedback and complaints from stakeholders which they must report and use to improve quality of care. In addition, consumer experience was added to the National Aged Care Mandatory Quality Indicator Program in April 2023. Food service and the mealtime experience are significant contributors to consumer experience. Using the Flinders University Toolkit to comprehensively collect stakeholder satisfaction information and align with research-informed strategies for implementation can contribute to improving quality of care and therefore the overall consumer experience.

Satisfaction is a key aspect of a positive consumer experience in Residential Aged Care, as highlighted by the emphasis on feedback in the Standards⁽⁶⁾ and recent work undertaken by Flinders University on menu and mealtime assessment, commissioned by Dietitians Australia⁽⁵⁾. While comprehensive menu reviews are important in this setting, and provision of adequate choice and variety support a sense of autonomy and quality of life for residents⁽⁷⁾, and can improve nutritional intake⁽⁸⁾, a menu, no matter how good, will not improve outcomes alone. Best practice in Residential Aged Care addresses the importance of the entire mealtime experience, alongside an appropriate menu, in improving quality of life, overall enjoyment and nutritional intake^(9,10). The Flinders University Toolkit can support aged care homes to maximise the satisfaction of residents, using a holistic approach to promote their menu and mealtime experience.

This project has highlighted the diversity in levels of satisfaction between stakeholders in aged care homes across Australia. Looking at overall satisfaction, there is little difference between residents (67%), family members (70%) and staff (71%) at the national level, however, there is a broad range across the states, and sections, within stakeholders. There is still much work to do in order to support aged care homes to make informed decisions about where to invest resources to maximise the menu and mealtime experience and the diversity highlights the need to provide targeted support to respond to areas where most impact can be achieved.



Except for Tasmania, where only one site was surveyed and received high satisfaction scores from both residents and staff, responses from all states indicated levels of satisfaction below the 75th percentile when compared to the national benchmarks, with some falling below the 50th percentile. Despite the diversity, these findings would appear to indicate that there is work to be done to improve the satisfaction of all stakeholders. Furthermore, this may not be a true picture of satisfaction across the sector as the data generated from this project may be ‘best-case scenario’, as the aged care homes that engaged were motivated to take part in the Maggie Beer Foundation program.

“Thanks for sending the result, it will be of great help in analysing our Food service and this will be presented during our Food Safety Team meeting.”

While participating sites have corroborated the value of the data and reports provided as part of this project, further analysis of data collected from this project will be able to provide guidance on potential areas for future investment to improve the menu and mealtime experience across the sector. Item level data from each of the questionnaires will provide value in understanding areas of consistent underperformance, with investment in these areas likely to achieve the best return on investment for any future initiatives.

Flinders University has received ongoing interest in our Toolkit from across Australia. The project team also see opportunities to engage with The Federal Government's Food, Nutrition and Dining Hotline to highlight that aged care homes identified in complaints may find value in working with Flinders University to implement the Toolkit and research informed strategies to improve the menu and mealtime experience. Flinders University is also committed to supporting the aged care workforce to understand the impact of food satisfaction, along with how to measure it and make research informed improvements. The project team are preparing to launch newly developed resources to support the training of the future aged care health and social care workforce. We look forward to continuing to contribute to consumer informed aged care food and nutrition reform.



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FOOD SERVICE SATISFACTION QUESTIONNAIRE BENCHMARKS



RESIDENT FOOD SERVICE SATISFACTION¹



PERCENTILE	OVERALL	SECTION 1 FOOD SERVED	SECTION 2 STAFF AND SUPPORTS
90 th	87%	93%	80%
75 th	79%	84%	71%
50 th	68%	73%	61%
25 th	57%	60%	49%
10 th	46%	49%	37%

FAMILY FOOD SERVICE SATISFACTION²

PERCENTILE	OVERALL	SECTION 1 PROVISION OF ENJOYABLE FOOD	SECTION 2 MEALTIME EXPERIENCE/ FOOD ACCESSIBILITY
90 th	89%	94%	87%
75 th	78%	79%	78%
50 th	67%	65%	69%
25 th	52%	41%	60%
10 th	39%	26%	46%



STAFF FOOD SERVICE SATISFACTION³



PERCENTILE	OVERALL	SECTION 1 FOOD SERVICE	SECTION 2 STAFF EMPLOYMENT
90 th	96%	98%	96%
75 th	86%	91%	84%
50 th	75%	78%	75%
25 th	64%	69%	62%
10 th	50%	53%	47%

1. Resident results taken from 1546 residents from around Australia who completed the survey.

2. Family results taken from 1100 family members from around Australia who completed the survey.

3. Staff results taken from 1078 staff from around Australia who completed the survey.