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30<sup>th</sup> September 2025

*National Food Security Team*  
Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry  
[foodsecurity@aff.gov.au](mailto:foodsecurity@aff.gov.au)

Dear National Food Security Team

*Re – National Food Security Strategy: Discussion Paper*

The Maggie Beer Foundation welcomes the opportunity to comment on the *National Food Security Strategy Discussion Paper*.

The Maggie Beer Foundation is committed to supporting older people to have access to good, fresh, nutritious food throughout their lives. We support the importance of this strategy.

While older people and those who care for them increasingly see exercise as an essential part of ageing well, the place of good food and proper nutrition is not nearly as well understood.

While there is rightly much attention in Australia to risks relating to obesity, a much more serious risk for an increasing number of older people is undernutrition.

Up to 10% of older adults living at home are likely to be malnourished, and a further 35% are at risk. In 2021, the Royal Commission into the Safety and Quality of Aged Care gave a scathing report about food in residential aged care homes. It accepted evidence that too many aged care residents were malnourished or at risk of being malnourished and nominated food and nutrition as urgent priorities requiring immediate attention.

Malnutrition in older adults is linked to increased risk of hospitalisation and institutionalisation, poorer recovery from illness or surgery, higher rates of falls and infections, reduced quality of life, and increased mortality.

We draw your attention to the seminal work of Dr Sandra Iuliano and colleagues who found compelling evidence of the central place of protein - and dairy protein in particular – as an ongoing dietary requirement as we age.

Populations of older people living in the community are particularly vulnerable to malnutrition -

- Individuals living alone: Older adults who live alone have less social support, which can negatively impact food intake and increase malnutrition risk. Social isolation often leads to lower motivation to prepare or eat meals, reduced access to groceries, and poorer dietary variety.
- Those with functional limitations or care dependency: Older adults who struggle with daily tasks (like shopping, cooking, or self-feeding) due to physical or cognitive decline are at much greater risk. These limitations can result in reduced food intake or poor meal quality.



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- People with chronic illness, dementia, or swallowing difficulties: Chronic diseases and cognitive impairments (including dementia) are associated with higher malnutrition risk. Swallowing problems (dysphagia) further compromise nutritional intake.
- People who rely on others for the supply and preparation of food, either at home or in an aged care home. This is influenced by the availability of a quality, trained workforce, as well as appropriate priority being given to good food.
- Low-income or economically disadvantaged seniors: Financial limitations can make it difficult to afford nutritious food, increasing reliance on cheaper, less nutritious options and potentially leading to malnutrition.

The Maggie Beer Foundation believes that Australia must do more -

- To explain the importance of good food as we age, including in the face of cost-of-living pressures
- To enable access by people to adequate, fresh, nutritious, flavoursome food throughout their lives
- To protect information about, and access to, fresh, local food for people in every setting and at every age.

We support the principles and note the importance of taking a whole food system approach and being outcome-focused and practical. We would particularly encourage measures that ensure that all populations get access to fresh, flavourful food, including those who rely on others for its distribution and preparation, often through an aged care or community service. The attraction, retention and training of a skilled culinary workforce to deliver these services is a high priority.

Yours sincerely

**Maggie Beer AO**  
**Founder and Director**

**Jane Mussared**  
**Chief Executive Officer**



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## 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 11 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 are equally committed to working with others to better understand and address the very real risk of malnutrition among older people living in their own homes, including those who live alone, and who, for a range of reasons, face barriers to enjoying healthy, delicious food. With the support of the Wicking Trust, we recently launched the HomePlate Project.

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."*

***Maggie Beer Foundation contact –***

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