



From Maggie Beer AO (Founder and Director) and Jane Mussared (CEO), Maggie Beer Foundation

November 1 marks the beginning of a new Aged Care Standard focused on food

November 1 2025 is an important date for residents of aged care homes and for older people using aged care in their own homes. It is the date that the new aged care act comes into operation and, with it, strengthened standards.

Eating well is inextricably linked with ageing and living well. Well beyond its importance as the source of essential nutrition, food is central to belonging, having purpose, being sociable and feeling valued. It is also a major preoccupation for most residents of an aged care home. But, until now, our aged care standards made only one explicit reference to food.

That changes on November 1 and the start of a new Standard 6, focused entirely on food and nutrition.

When consultation about the strengthened standards began several years ago, the Maggie Beer Foundation joined other passionate advocates in arguing for a new standard that concentrated on food. Together, we advocated for a standard that provided clear and practical requirements which, while not being too prescriptive, were workable, transparent, focused on food quality and the dining experience, set a high bar and defined benchmarks against which a home could be audited.

We argued that aged care standards had to address the presentation and sensory impact of food, its nutritional content, its address of cultural requirements, its provision for personal preferences and choices, and its catering for physical eating challenges.

We supported the importance of great care and allied health staff (including dietitians and speech pathologists) but we also wanted much more attention to be paid to the training needs of the people in an aged care home who make or break the food and dining experience – the cooks, chefs and kitchen teams.

And so, at last, Standard 6 is here. It is not in itself a guarantee of great food for all older Australians. However, in paving the way for stronger recognition and regulation, Standard 6 has already put a spotlight on food in aged care homes and, to a limited extent, food for people living in their own homes. Aged care conferences in 2025 are much more likely to include food, nutrition and dining on the main agenda. Dietitians and speech pathologists are more influential in menu and mealtime assessments and in undertaking assessments of older residents. Excellence in texture-modified food now commands attention. The relevant national skills board is developing units of competency to support chefs who work in an aged care setting.

From a Foundation point of view, while our aged care cooks, chefs and kitchen teams are often still left out of conversations, this is also beginning to change. Our own training, once entirely reliant on fee-for-service and donations, is now available free for aged care providers thanks to a federal government grant.

Eating well is central to good aged care. It is central to ageing well. While no silver bullet or single solution will fix the problem nominated by the Royal Commission as one of four concerns “for immediate attention”, the Maggie Beer Foundation welcomes Standard 6 as a line in the sand, signalling that food should never again be an afterthought.

While we need to keep our aspirations high and resist the temptation to medicalise food or to threaten its familiarity, pleasure and sensory opportunities, we welcome the motivation and ambition among aged care providers, government and regulators. We must all play our part in ensuring that food in aged care delivers on its potential for purpose, value, worth, excitement, nutrition, companionship and joy.

1 November 2025