



THE HOMEPLATE PROJECT

Insights



A Maggie Beer Foundation Initiative

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HomePlate Insights

Most older people want to live at home throughout their lives. But staying at home and staying well are not always the same thing. Malnutrition can build slowly and quietly, making it harder for people to remain healthy, independent and connected.

The HomePlate Project was created to understand what helps older people eat well at home, and what gets in the way. Led by The Maggie Beer Foundation, this two-year national project explores the everyday experiences that shape whether food is eaten and enjoyed, and the initiatives that support better food experiences as we age.

This first stage of the project – HomePlate Insights - has focused on the food experiences of older people living at home. It is made up of three volumes:

01 A national survey of almost 2,500 older people

02 In-depth one-on-one interviews and focus groups with 234 older people in four states, including in regional areas

03 A comprehensive literature review undertaken by the University of Sydney.

Most older people say they eat well, but eating well can become more challenging as we age, and people's experiences can vary from day to day and over time.

Sometimes suddenly, or more often over time, changes happen to older people's relationship with food, including:

- eating less
- cooking less often or not at all
- eating alone more often
- losing motivation to cook
- having to cook for the first time

These changes matter because they can affect health, independence, purpose, connection and wellbeing.

The Core Insight

Eating well is more than knowing what's healthy or having food available. Eating well is, first and foremost, about having a reason to bother.

Across all three volumes, the strongest drivers of eating well are:

- motivation and enjoyment
- confidence and capability
- social connection

While access to food is essential, it doesn't automatically lead to eating well.

The Five Key Messages

01

Enjoying food is important

When food brings pleasure, purpose and something to look forward to, people are more likely to stay engaged and motivated with cooking and eating. Motivation and enjoyment can be the difference between simply having food in the house and eating it. Life changes, including living alone for the first time, can be a major barrier to both.

03

Notice small changes early

It's fine, until it isn't. Changes in appetite, eating habits, energy or interest in food can have a bigger impact than people realise. Recognising these changes early creates opportunities to respond before they affect health, wellbeing and independence.

02

Confidence in the kitchen matters

As life changes, so do the ways people shop, cook and eat. Older people say they would like practical help – for example recipe ideas, and simple cooking skills and support - that help them adapt, stay independent and prepare food in ways that work for them.

04

Food is better shared

For many people, food is more likely to be eaten and enjoyed when it is shared. Opportunities to connect around food can help support appetite, motivation, enjoyment and overall wellbeing.

05

Keep food advice simple and practical

Many older people say they don't want complicated messages about nutritional guidelines. But many do want clear, every day, practical information and tips about eating well, and the confidence to act on it themselves.

What This Means (the “So What”)

Food support for older people living at home has made delivered, frozen or prepared meals the priority. While that remains important, the HomePlate Insights show that this alone is not enough.

We also need to expand the focus from simply providing food to building confidence and skills, creating opportunities to connect around food, spotting early warning signs, and making food advice easier to understand and use. The next stage of the HomePlate Project will explore and map practical initiatives to address these needs.





Thank you.

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We thank our HomePlate Think Tank, our survey partner Square Holes, and the many older people across the country, in cities, regional towns and rural communities, who generously shared their experiences of food. These lived experiences sit at the centre of the HomePlate project.

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