

# What are Australian aged care residents willing to pay for tastier food?

## Considerations for Consumer-Directed-Care

### The problem

Malnutrition is a large problem among people with dementia living in residential care and individualised dietary care is essential to ensure quality of life for people. However budgetary and staffing constraints can make it difficult to find the time to provide a personalised approach in all care aspects.

### The study

This study by Flinders University utilized a discrete choice experiment approach to understand what were the most preferred, and least preferred characteristics of dining in residential aged care for residents (including those with dementia) and their families.

We asked participants to consider and prioritise five factors which are:

1. the taste of the food,
2. the level of choice over serving size,
3. the time of meal selection,
4. the level of flexibility of mealtimes, the visual presentation, and
5. any additional cost.

We were also able to calculate whether participants would be willing to pay for their preferences for meals.



## The results

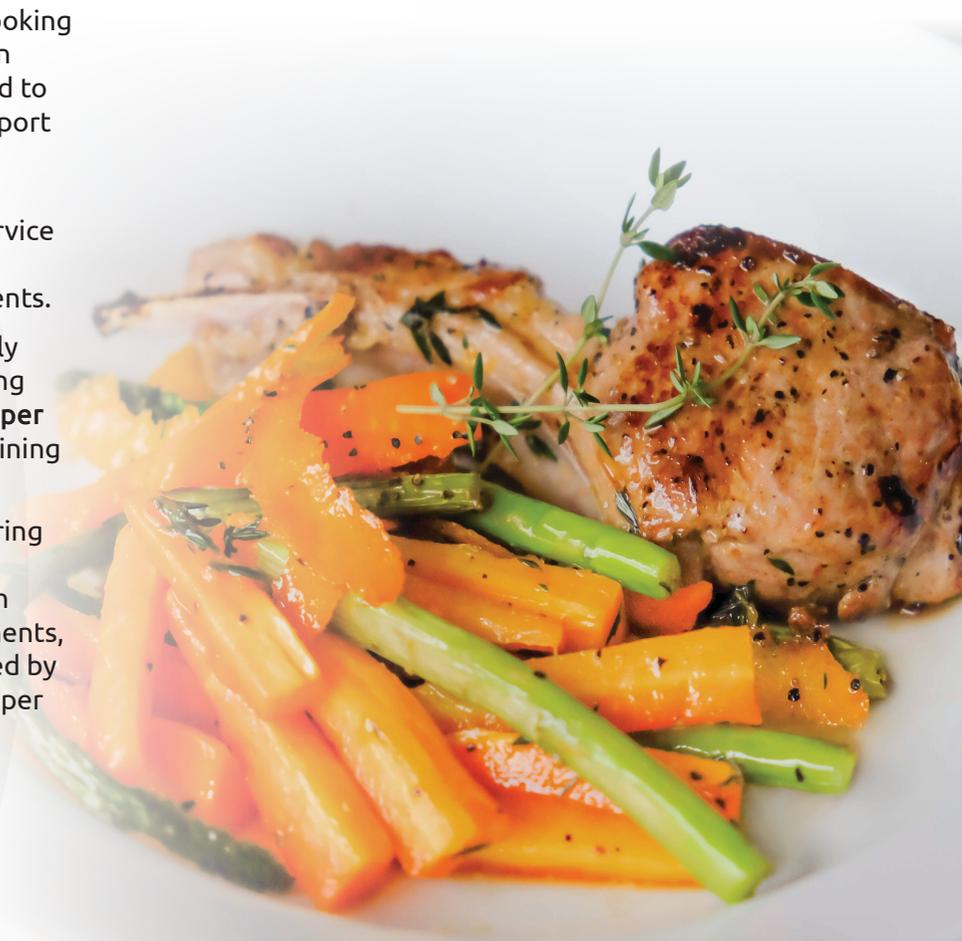
All of the attributes included in the experiment were important determinants of preferences of residents and their families for food and dining in nursing homes. **The most important factor was the taste of the food:** having food that tasted excellent was considered the most important characteristic. Having no choice in the meal provided was viewed negatively while having more choice about serving size was viewed positively.

We also found participants would be willing to pay for some improvements in food service, such as an **additional \$24 per week** for food which tasted excellent, or an additional \$8 per week to have a large amount of choice over serving sizes. Results also indicated that residents or their families would want to be compensated for some negative food characteristics, such as poor tasting food, no choice over serving sizes, and having no choice of meal.

This Flinders University study highlights that improving the **taste of the food** is critical to consumer satisfaction in residential care, and should be prioritized.

## Suggested Improvements to Food Service in Aged Care facilities

- Strategies will probably differ across providers and sites, but could include
  - a) maintaining food preparation and cooking within facilities (so that residents can smell food as it is being prepared and to minimize loss in flavour during transport and reheating)
  - b) access to professional development and improved education for food service professionals
  - c) investment in better quality ingredients.
- **Willingness to pay:** Residents and family members indicated they would be willing to pay an additional investment of **\$24 per week** to have better quality food and dining service
- Adding this amount to an average catering budget would be equivalent to a **42% increase**; based on an average spend on catering (including food costs, supplements, consumables, cutlery/crockery) reported by facilities in Australia of \$8 per resident per day (Hugo et al. 2018)



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Hugo, C, Isenring, E, Sinclair, D & Agarwal, E 2018, 'What does it cost to feed aged care residents in Australia?', *Nutr Diet*, vol. 75, no. 1, Feb, pp. 6-10.

Milte, R, Ratcliffe, J, Chen, G, Miller, M & Crotty, M 2018, 'Taste, choice and timing: Investigating resident and carer preferences for meals in aged care homes', *Nursing & Health Sciences*, vol. 20, no. 1, pp. 116-124.