

A game changer in food and aged care

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A groundbreaking collaboration drawing together cooking heavyweights, leading nutrition experts and aged care providers is set to become a game changer in the world of food and nutrition in aged care.

Backed by Australian food personalities Maggie Beer, Simon Bryant and Peter Morgan-Jones as well as The Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Foundation, [The Lantern Project](#) has set itself the huge task of revolutionising aged care's food culture.

The ambitious collaboration, announced last week, has identified seven key objectives to create widespread industry change across the areas of research, advocacy and education to improve the quality of life of residents through food.

The objectives include identifying the cost savings that can be made through good nutrition in aged care, advocating for changes to the Aged Care Funding Instrument and accreditation process, as well as increasing the sector's bargaining power to purchase locally grown, high quality Australian produce.

The 20-member Lantern Project is the brainchild of Cherie Hugo, a dietician with more than 14 years' experience in aged care, whose PhD study at Bond University on the cost benefits of good nutrition will be a foundation study for the sector.

While quantitative data has highlighted potential savings in a hospital environment from a focus on nutrition, studies are yet to be replicated in residential aged care. "If we are going to encourage culture change in aged care facilities and change in government policy, we need to be demonstrating the dollar savings," Ms Hugo told *Australian Ageing Agenda*.

"It's about shifting the model in aged care to valuing nutrition and the importance it can have on all other aspects of care," she said. "If we can improve the nutritional status of residents, we will see the incidence of associated issues like pressure ulcers, falls and hospitalisations also decrease."

She said all seven areas of action were equally important and must be achieved together to achieve long-term, sustainable change.

Other objectives include developing edible gardens, empowering aged care staff and residents and advocating for the development of healthy eating guidelines for the elderly that focus on flavour and the joy of food.

Ms Hugo also discussed the need to address regulation that unreasonably restricted the food choices of residents. "We have to keep safety in mind but a lot of the guidelines have gone too far," she said. "One facility I work at has set up this amazing veggie patch, and the residents are wanting to eat the fresh produce, but they are not allowed to because of regulation."

As part of the multidisciplinary project, Ms Hugo will also explore how the sector can strengthen its bargaining power to put pressure on food suppliers to source Australian produce and bargain for cheaper contracts.

The announcement of The Lantern Project coincided with the launch of the [Maggie Beer Foundation](#), which aims to work with aged care providers to celebrate innovation and to encourage others to lift standards across meal choice, planning and food service. Both initiatives will work together to disseminate research findings and strategies and champion for change in the sector. (The upcoming July-August edition of *Australian Ageing Agenda* will carry an in-depth interview with high-profile cook and food author, Maggie Beer on her vision for the foundation.)

Providers involved in The Lantern Project include Southern Cross Care Victoria, RSL Care and Churches of Christ Care. Consumer advocates will also provide a voice to discuss the impact quality food and nutrition can have on residents and their families. Other project members include respected food law experts, dentists and director of accountancy firm, Stewart Brown.

For more information on the project objectives and members or to participate in the study go to the [project website](#).