



**ST VINCENT'S CARE**  
PROUDLY PART OF ST VINCENT'S HEALTH AUSTRALIA

# Do Aged Care Residents and Families Agree on Food?

An aged care resident and family food preference mini-review for 2024





## Summary

The need for good food in aged care is ongoing focus for not just St Vincent's Care, but the entire aged care industry.

Through regular surveys, St Vincent's performs ongoing reviews for all aspects of care. However, particular attention of late has been paid to the service and quality of food within St Vincent's aged care.

Besides the need for ongoing improvement in food services, useful trends around the differences in preferences between residents and family began to emerge.

### Why the report?

This short report aims to illustrate the subtle differences in preferences in aged care food between residents and families, proposes potential reasons as to why this is the case and offers insight into how differing levels of expectations can affect the relationship between service providers and service recipients in other areas of aged care.



## Research Methodology

### Methods used

- \* Data collected from MARS (health and aged care audit program) resident surveys, RateIt family surveys and Riskman feedback between Oct '22 and Oct '23
- \* 1986 responses, surveys and clinical entries as a part of the research

### Where they came from

- \* Populations of 23 aged care homes surveyed
- \* Mix of regional and urban aged care homes
- \* Mix of higher and lower socio economic areas (room prices ranged from \$195k to \$1.6m)

QUEENSLAND

NEW SOUTH  
WALES

VICTORIA



# Overall findings in preferences

## Questions asked in survey

Qualitative data was collected from multiple touchpoints along with the St Vincent's quarterly Customer Experience (CX) survey.

This CX survey is conducted twice a year as a means of constant improvement within St Vincent's food delivery services.

Two main questions were pulled out of the CX report that elicited the responses and analysis found within this report:

**Q1 Do you like the food choices offered (Y/N)**

**Q2 Can you elaborate the reason for your answer**

A comprehensive analysis was conducted to identify the key themes of the responses to these questions among residents and family.

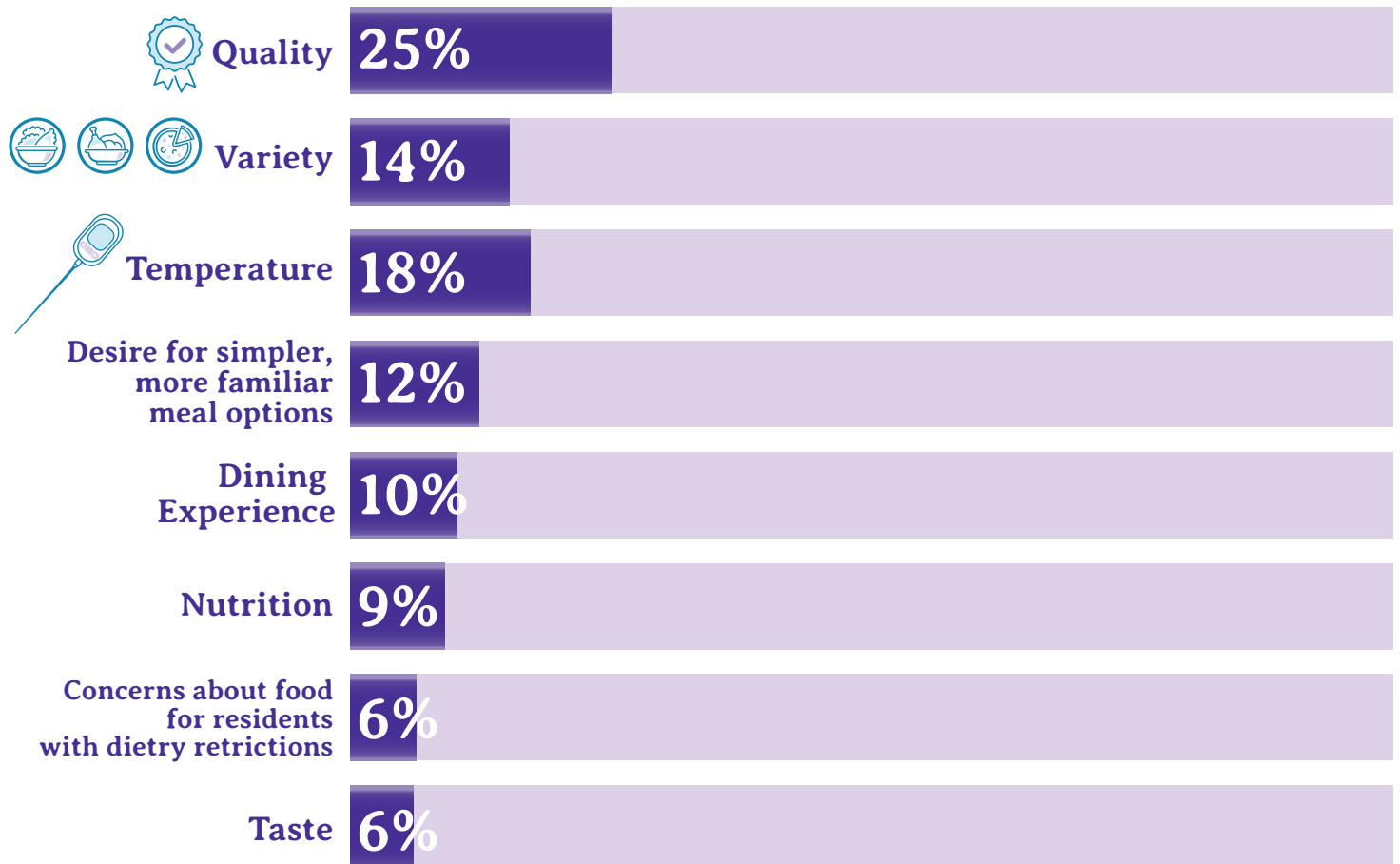


# Family preferences on food in aged care

## Definition of 'family'

For the purposes of this report 'family' refers to any Next Of Kin that are directly involved in the organisation of care for the resident in aged care.

## Family food preferences data



*Think the meals could vary more and be better quality.*

*Food quality appears very average and repetitive. Otherwise happy with the facility.*

*Our mother likes very plain food and often comments about "fancy sauces" and unfamiliar dishes.*

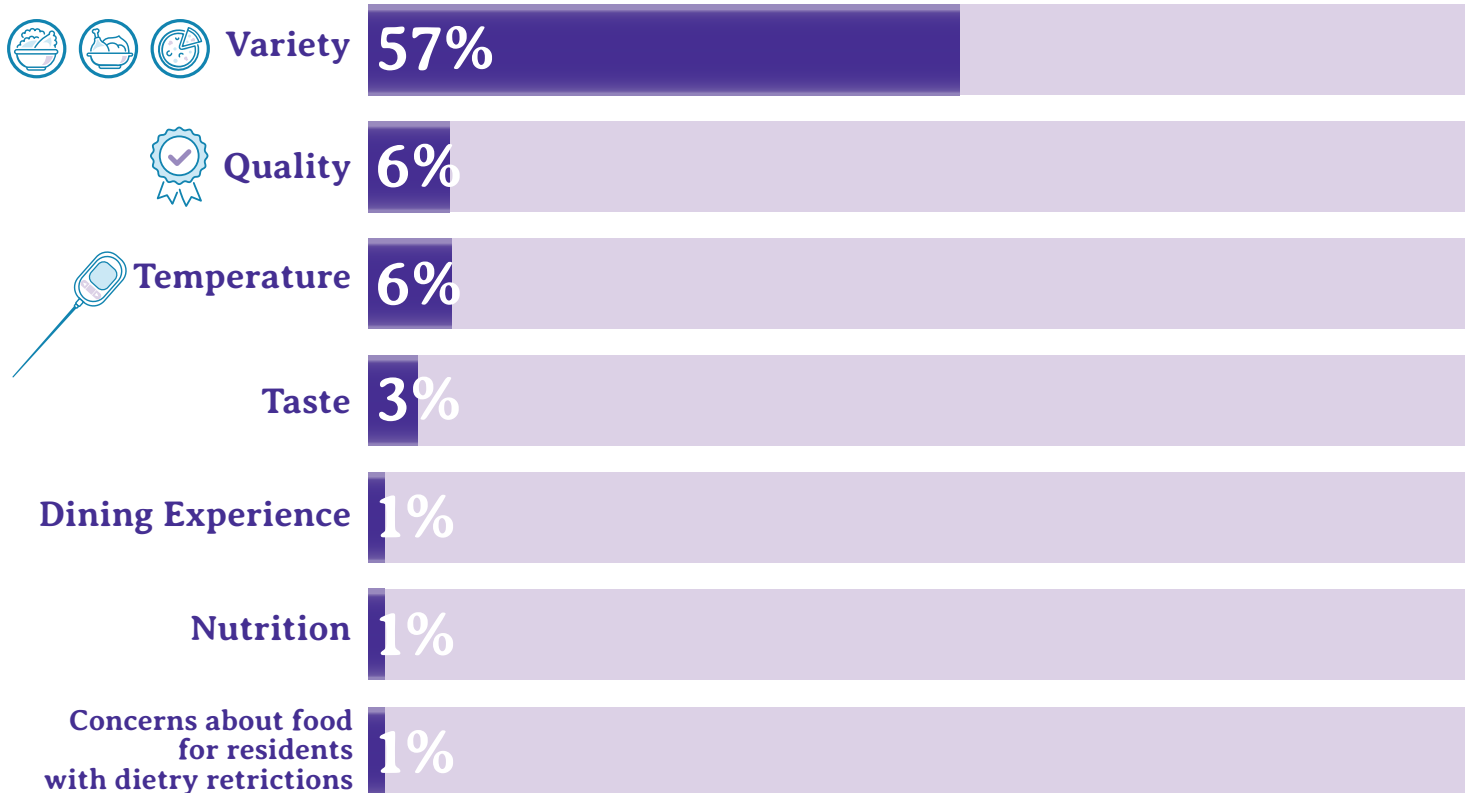


# Resident preferences on food in aged care

## Definition of 'resident'

For the purposes of this report 'family' refers to any Next Of Kin that are directly involved in the organisation of care for the resident in aged care.

## Resident food preferences data



*I would like more  
curry and stews*

*My problem is with my  
special diet because it  
limits my choices. I would  
like more choices that suit  
my dietary needs.*



*Certain food do not agree with me,  
but if I don't like a meal staff will  
organise something else for me*

*Have spoken to management regarding  
my food preferences, not spicy, just  
old fashioned cooking*

# The differences in preferences on food in aged care

## 4 main observed differences in the results

Analysis of food feedback of residents compared to families saw 4 main differences:

- 1** Residents care most about variety of cuisines and ability to choose what and when to eat.
- 2** Families are more concerned about nutrition and quality of the food rather than taste.
- 3** Families would also like more variety but care about the texture of food more than residents overall.
- 4** Residents care a lot more about taste of the food being too bland than families do.



## Why the differences?

While the differences in food expectations cannot be explained through this report alone, there are 2 areas worth considering as potential reasons for the differences.

### 1 Residents are the ones actually eating the food

While nutrition & quality are high on the list of things that families want for food in aged care, variety is by far the biggest desire of aged care residents when it comes to their diets.

Understandably, loved ones want their family to be well looked after and safe. However, as a resident, the experience of eating food and in a meal with other people, should be varied and exciting.

It should continue to be stressed that a holistic approach to care, one that promotes a healthy life, but also an enjoyment of that life, is the ideal and an effective balance of the two should be maintained.



### 2 There is a generational divide between families and their loved ones living in aged care

There is strong potential here for the differences in expectations of food to be linked to a generational divide between the 'Silent Generation' (born 1928-1945) and the Baby Boomers (1946-1964).

While similar in some ways to 'phase of life' there are inherent cultural factors that could potentially influence expectations.

Baby Boomers are perhaps more aware of the effects of nutrition more so than the previous generation as they are living longer and smoking less. However their overall health and diet are less nutritious.

Freedoms not afforded to the older generation decades ago are now being taken advantage of more fully in things like, taste, variety, choice and timings of meals though preferences are to keep things simple.





# Conclusion and findings

While the battle for better food is an ongoing theme in aged care, the differences in preferences between residents and families raises another interesting point of contention in aged care: communication.

There's still work to be done in bridging the divide between resident and next of kin expectations when it comes to food. Whether generational, cultural or otherwise different, the divides have the potential to cause issues and miscommunications in care particularly with an area as important and integral to life as meals and food.

There's a real opportunity for aged care providers to continue to foster communication between residents and families, not just in the context of food, but in the context of holistic care as a whole.