



**Background** 

- Three projects conducted as part of an overall research program into healthy ageing among rural older people, with a focus on the role of social engagement in 'ageing well'.
- Funded by HACC, the team included both academic researchers and nutritionists working in policy and practice. Reference group support was provided by senior nutritionists and senior HACC colleagues.

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**The Projects** 

**Healthy Eating for Healthy Ageing in Rural Tasmania**

- Research study exploring the strengths and weaknesses of three government-funded meals services for older people in rural Tasmania (Meals on Wheels, Eating with Friends and Day Centre).


**Healthy Eating Healthy Ageing: Perspectives from a Rural Community**

- Case study of a specific rural community. Investigated what social and structural resources were available in the community to support social eating opportunities for 'at risk' older residents. Reported by Dr Peter Orpin at the last AAG conference.

**Social Eating for Older People: A Literature Review**


- Review of Australian and international literature to identify available models and programs to support social eating interventions for older people.

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**Key Findings of the Three Projects** 


- The **social dimension** of services was more important to older people than the nutritional content or quality of the meals provided.
- Models of social eating that reflect the **diversity of older people** by offering a range of opportunities and experiences are valued most highly.
- Approaches which develop social networks need to be **explicitly valued** and developed in service planning, rather than seen as an 'optional extra'.
- Despite plenty of available physical and social resources there were very few programs providing **regular** nutritious meals in a social setting specifically to older people.

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**Key Findings (cont)** 

- There was a **good range of socialisation opportunities** for older people in the community, many of which involved the sharing of food. However, in most cases the **food was incidental and not always of sufficient nutritional quality**.
- The literature review identified a **diverse range of programs and approaches** to providing social eating opportunities for older people nationally and internationally.
- Many of the programs had emerged from **local community driven initiatives** with a focus on building capacity and connection among participants rather than simply being a top down service 'delivered to' participants.
- Policy frameworks are essentially conservative and haven't reflected geographic and social diversity or demographic change.

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**Key Findings (cont)** 

- **Programs can be mixed and matched** to combine social and nutritional elements within existing frameworks, but this flexibility depends on local initiatives which may 'bend the rules'.
- **Social eating opportunities** for older people can be found in a range of existing programs not specifically designed for older people.
- The literature review highlighted the **importance of partnerships** in bringing most programs into life; partnerships between schools, businesses, community groups, NGOs, councils and government.

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## A 'Menu' of Models and Programs



A 'menu' of programs and services offering nutritious and affordable meals in a range of social settings. Existing models which could be used to support such a menu include:

- Community meals
- Eating out programs
- Café and restaurant vouchers
- Community kitchens
- Gardening programs
- Farmers Market programs
- Nutrition Education programs
- Host-home programs
- Delivered meals which include social elements.

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## Flexible Service Delivery



- **Delivered meals services can be adapted to include social eating dimensions** either by expanding the role of the meal deliverer (e.g. Cooina Connection / Stafford District Meals on Wheels) or taking a more flexible approach to where and when meals are delivered (e.g. Edmonton Meals on Wheels Lunch Club).
- **Social programs can be combined with nutritional programs** to provide social eating experiences (e.g. Braystone mobile fruit and vegetable stall combined with 'Gateways' social group for elderly residents of high rise flats).
- **Programs designed for groups within the broader community can be adapted or better targeted to improve access for older people** (e.g. Café Meals Programs, Community Kitchens, Community Gardens, Market Programs).

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## Community Facilitator Model



Employment of **local community facilitators** to:

- Identify and develop a range of social eating opportunities for older people in their area;
- Work collaboratively and synergistically with other relevant programs operating in the local context to **build social eating into existing infrastructure and programs**;
- Identify and facilitate **networks and partnerships** to ensure the best use of available resources (both physical and social) to meet local needs;
- Draw on **community development principles** to build capacity and connection amongst participants; and
- Draw on principles of **social entrepreneurship** to develop innovative and flexible approaches to providing social eating programs and services.

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## Social Entrepreneurs



*A social entrepreneur is a key individual who is able to develop new, more responsive methods of service delivery designed to reach groups who have been by-passed by mainstream programs* (Edwards et al, 2002).

### Key Characteristics of Social Entrepreneurs

- Show a capacity to **recognize and take advantage of opportunities** that create social value – "visionary opportunists and alliance builders"
- **Employ innovation**, ranging from outright invention to adapting someone else's novelty, in creating and/or distributing social value
- Is/are willing to accept an **above-average degree of risk** in creating and disseminating social value; and
- Is/are **unusually resourceful** in being relatively undaunted by scarce assets in pursuing their social venture.

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## An Agenda for the Future



### Policy frameworks and service planning that:

Explicitly value **the social dimensions of eating** and allow for the development of programs that address both social isolation and nutritional risk.

Provide for a **broader range and greater frequency of social eating opportunities** available to older people - recognize that "one size doesn't fit all" and that people have preferred levels of socialisation.

**Support and encourage flexible service delivery** to create opportunities for social eating experiences – "value adding"

Enable **community facilitation** through budget holding.

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