

Media Release

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Aged care dining in the spotlight for a showdown!

An exciting cooking competition is bringing joy to aged care residents across Victoria and inspiring aged care chefs to think outside the (mystery) box when it comes to dining!

For-purpose aged and disability organisation VMCH is approaching the semifinals of its unique Dining Room Showdown, a friendly competition which pits two aged care hospitality teams from its 14 residences against each other in a bid to be crowned Showdown Champ.

Taking inspiration from popular televised cooking shows, each team receives a 'mystery box' of ingredients on competition day. From there, they must create a fresh and exciting two-course menu for 30 people, including aged residents, family members, staff and industry professionals.

Taste testers then rate the dishes on dining experience, culinary passion, presentation and food safety.

Head Chef Sanath Wanniarachchi, who is spearheading the competition, says the aim is to create some fun, excitement and socialisation for the aged care community.

"At the heart of this competition lies our commitment to providing outstanding dining experiences for our residents. We, as chefs, are always hospitality-oriented people. We want to ensure those we serve are happy and fulfilled by what is put in front of them."

Residents involved in the five competitions held since September last year have devoured delicious dishes including ricotta and spinach chicken with tomato medley, pan-seared rosemary lamb with mushroom risotto, and mango trifle for dessert.

Aged care resident Graeme dined at the Wantirna versus Berwick competition in January. "The chicken I absolutely loved; it was a beauty," Graeme said. "And the company was great, you couldn't get any better."

Resident Janice enjoyed the social aspect of the day. "It's been fun to mingle with other people and to see another residence. Everyone has been very warm and friendly to us."

Hospitality teams are enjoying the chance to collaborate and be inspired by each other, taking great pride in what they're plating up.

Chef Manager Karen Stansfield from Berwick described it as "a fantastic experience".

"It was a great opportunity to showcase the important work we do as chefs in aged care, highlighting our passion and what we do every day. I have never seen something like this before in residential aged care and I hope there will be more events like this in the future!"

General Manager of Residential Aged Care Sally Bliesner says the competition is part of VMCH's ongoing commitment to enhance the dining experience for residents.

"The showdown is a fun initiative which not only showcases our chefs' diverse range of skills but is a fantastic social experience for our residents, who get to visit other homes and meet new people."

Ms Smart added other ongoing hospitality initiatives included creating higher-quality and varied texture-modified foods to give vulnerable residents more choice, the introduction of buffet breakfasts at all homes, and the rollout of a VMCH dining room training program.

"We recognise mealtimes are something residents in aged care look forward to, and that many of our residents have spent their lifetimes cooking and have a keen interest in food, so we want to make their experience as enjoyable and diverse as possible."

Semifinals for the VMCH Dining Room Showdown will be held throughout May, before two finalist teams battle it out in the Grand Finale in June.

MEDIA OPPORTUNITIES IN COMING WEEKS/MONTHS.

HIGHER RES IMAGES AVAILABLE ON REQUEST.

Media enquiries

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About VMCH

Here at VMCH, our services are as diverse as the people we support.

Our values underpin the work we do. As a Catholic, for-purpose organisation, love, joy, hospitality and courage aren't just words to us, they guide us in everything we do.

While we've been around for over a century, we're always moving forward. Always staying true to who we are by supporting people and families to live their best lives; providing a place to call home and spaces to learn and grow.

Our professional and compassionate teams are with you on your life journey; helping you with a wide range of support from early learning and therapy, specialist education, disability services, affordable homes, residential aged care, retirement living and at-home aged care.