

5 minutes with...Mel Frost

[Jacqui Fahey](#) | Educator

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Mel shares an update on a new pilot project covering a “patient-centred” model of food services for public hospitals in NSW.

Mel's details ...

Associate Director, Food Service Reform | Clinical Support Service at HealthShare NSW

What is the CHEF project? Project CHEF stands for Co-Designing Healthy and Enjoyable Food and it's all about making the hospital patient food service experience the best it can be. Through Project CHEF we will introduce a customisable menu and flexible mealtimes, so patients can order what they want when they are hungry. Meals will be more appetising because we're preparing them fresh when they are ordered and we're also focusing on presenting the food in an appealing way. Another element that the project is focusing on is sustainability by aiming to reduce food and kitchen wastage and diverting this waste from landfill.

In a nutshell, Project CHEF is underpinned by the following six core design principles:

- Attractive food options
- Respecting patient choice
- Flexible meal access
- Service excellence
- Sustainability
- Patient centred

What instigated this project? Project CHEF was initiated because we want to continue to move towards an even more “patient-centred” model of food services for public hospitals in NSW. HealthShare NSW spent two months at the end of 2019 working with key stakeholders from all aspects of Health, including hospital staff, patients, clinicians and suppliers to learn more about the patient food experience and collate meaningful suggestions for a future model. From this engagement activity, stakeholders told us they wanted to see more variety across food services, options for meal customisation, flexible meal availability, increased accessibility, real tableware and a sustainability-conscious food experience. Based on what stakeholders told us, the Project CHEF concept was developed and encapsulates a vision and blueprint for a patient-centred food experience.

What are some of the sustainable approaches being trialed? One of the key benefits of Project CHEF is that it will continue to reduce food wastage. Having patients order when they are hungry has resulted in reduced plate waste at other similar sites. Patients can customise the menu and choose items they enjoy eating that are compliant with their therapeutic dietary requirements. We have partnered with South West Sydney Local Health District to better able to manage food (organic) waste and divert it from landfill. We will be introducing an eWater sanitation system that generates a stream of commercial grade disinfectant, sanitiser and a multi-purpose cleaning solution onsite and reduces the requirement for chemical use in the kitchen.

If this pilot is successful, will this be available throughout NSW and to other States? Initially, Project CHEF will be rolled out via a pilot project at Bowral & District Hospital from March 2021. This pilot will help us to understand how we can replicate and scale the project across the state in the future. If successful, the Project CHEF design principles will provide the building blocks that will be used to develop new food service models at sites across NSW. Project CHEF is not a one-size-fits-all food service model. Depending on the site, the number, application and combination of design principles will be different.

The Project CHEF design principles will be used to create the best food service model for the needs of the site through a co-design process between HealthShare NSW, Local Health Districts and patients. Alongside the pilot of Project CHEF at Bowral Hospital, the project team will also be investigating ways to introduce some of the design principles across all sites and independent of an entirely new food service model.

Have any other similar programs been trialed? Project CHEF builds on the work we’ve been doing over the past few years to introduce a more patient-centred food experience for patients in public hospitals. HealthShare NSW introduced My Food Choice in 2017 as a new, more personalised way of serving patient meals in NSW public hospitals. My Food Choice uses technology to cut the time between ordering and receiving meals to under 4 hours while improving the choice, quality and nutrition of food choices. Patients can choose from a menu of up to 18 hot meals at lunch and dinner. My Food Choice connects Food Service staff with patients – they talk to each patient and take their order on a tablet which is then sent straight to the kitchen.

We have worked with local producers to ensure each meal is easy to open, reflects a variety of foods, supports Australian businesses and meets NSW Health's mandatory nutrition standards. As staff collect meal trays, they record what the patient has eaten on their tablet device. This can be sent directly to the patient's clinician, to support nutrition care planning. We have found the My Food Choice model extremely successful in giving more choice and better nutrition for patients, while also have a lot of benefits for our staff while also significantly reducing food and kitchen waste.

How can we find out more on the CHEF project? We would be happy to provide additional information about Project CHEF – you can contact us at HSNSW-FoodServiceReform@health.nsw.gov.au. We have also developed an [animated video about Project CHEF](#) that you can watch on YouTube.

Myself as a consumer representative with HealthShare NSW over the past few years have found it inspiring to be able to advocate on behalf of consumers/patients, how might one get involved with becoming a consumer representative? Health Consumers NSW has a lot of useful information about becoming a consumer representative on their website at [HCNSW](#). Many of the Local Health Districts also promote opportunities to get involved at the local level, which you can find on their websites or by contacting their Community Relations Departments.

Thanks for your time today Mel. We look forward to hearing more on the CHEF project in good time. All the best for the pilot at Bowral and District Hospital.