

# Better Together

## Improving parent and carer access to food

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### Case for change

There are over 56,000 admissions every year across the two tertiary hospitals within The Sydney Children's Hospitals Network (SCHN). During the admission, parents and carers stay alongside their child providing comfort and emotional support and act as a communication link between the child and clinicians.



**Family Centred Care**  
Carers are vital for patient care during a hospital stay

SCHN prioritises family centred care and sees parents and carers as an extension of the patient.

Consumer feedback has highlighted the limitations parents and carers have in their ability to meet their own needs, in particular accessing food when staying in hospital with their child.



**1 in 2**  
Carers state they don't have adequate access to food during a hospital stay



**7 in 10**  
Carers want better access to food during a hospital stay

### Goal

To improve carer access to food at mealtimes to elevate the inpatient experience for patients, carers and families within the inpatient units (IPU) of Sydney Children's Hospital (SCH) and The Children's Hospital at Westmead (CHW) by December 2023.

### Objectives

Increase the percentage of parent or carer surveyed responses of 'Strongly Agree' & 'Somewhat Agree' to the question of having adequate carer access to food from 46% to 60% by December 2023.



Image 1: Photo of patient and carer of CHW, 2022

"Food needs to be available for parents of children with serious health conditions" (Carer quote, 2022)

### Method

Historical data from the Bureau Health Information Admitted Children and Young Patients Survey 2018 and SCHN/HealthShare NSW Children's Food Survey 2020-2022 was analysed for qualitative themes.

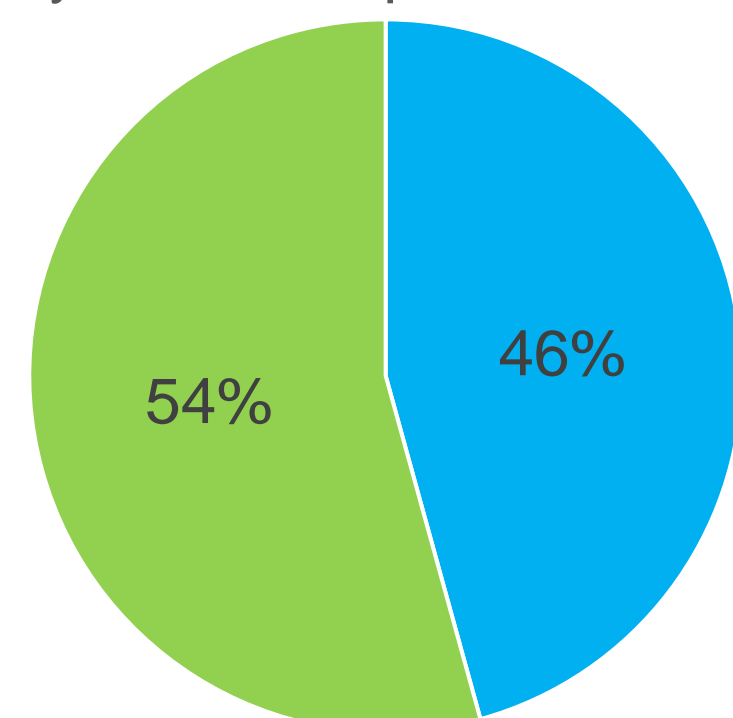
Staff workshops (30 participants) were held to understand the clinical perspective of the mealtime environment for families.

In August 2022, current and past inpatients and their families from SCHN were invited to participate in either a semi-structured interview or an anonymous survey to share their experience of mealtimes in hospital. Participants were recruited via printed flyers circulated on the inpatient meal tray, displayed on the ward kitchens, as well as via social media.

Solutions workshops, using Blitz brainstorm and dotmocracy techniques, were held with stakeholders in November 2022 to elicit solutions ideas, which were then prioritised based on ability to influence and impact.

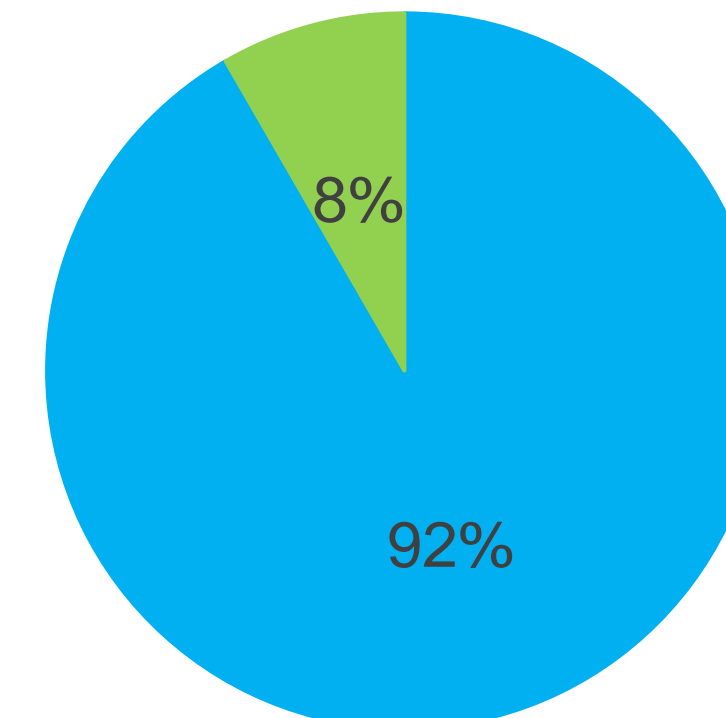
### Diagnostic Results

As a parent/carer of a patient in the hospital, I currently have adequate access to food



■ Strongly Agree / Somewhat Agree  
■ Strongly Disagree / Somewhat Disagree

It is important that as a carer of a patient in the hospital, I have adequate access to food



■ Strongly Agree / Somewhat Agree  
■ Strongly Disagree / Somewhat Disagree

Figure 1: Sample questions and responses from Better Together Survey – October 2022 (n=36)

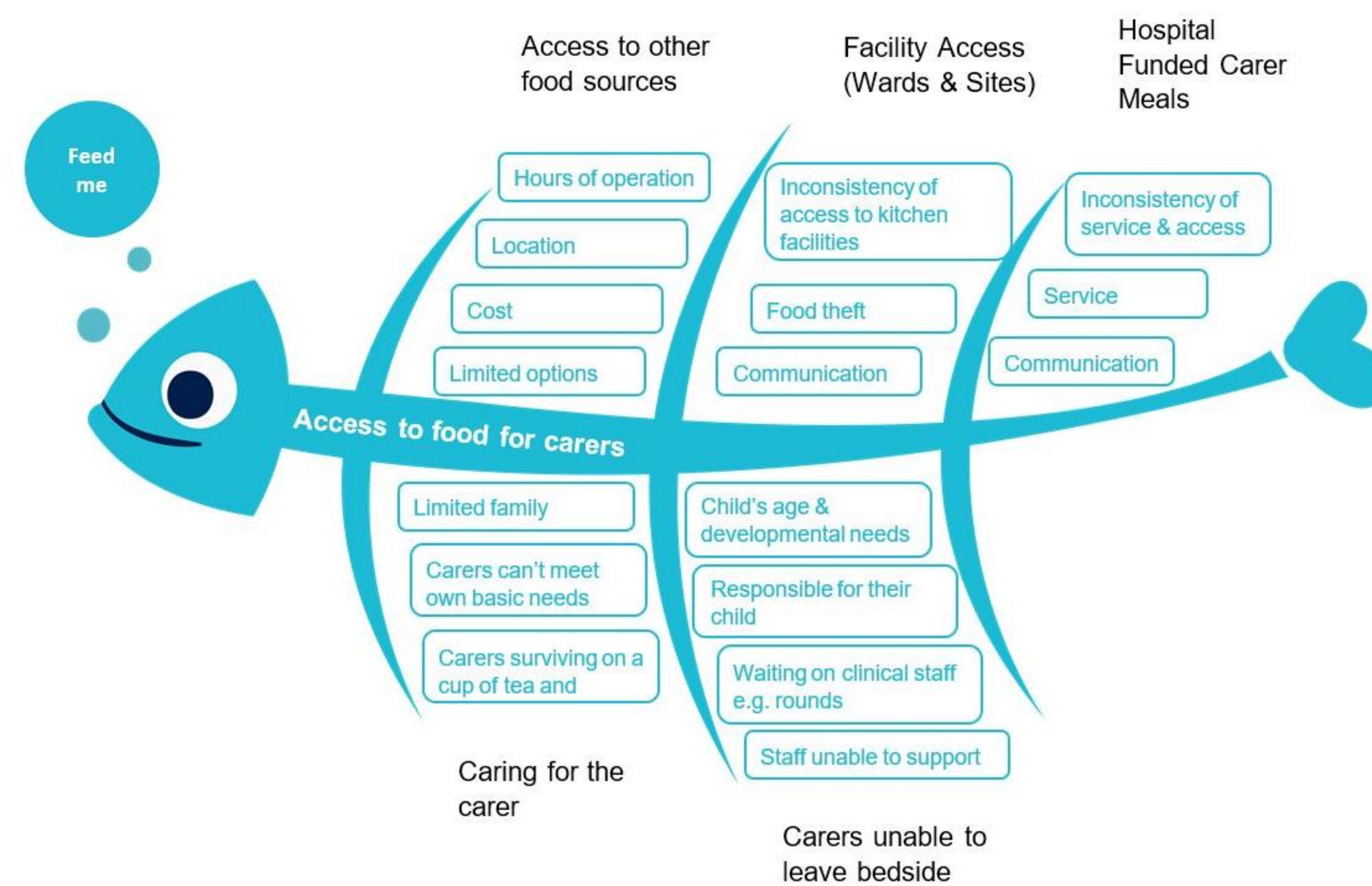


Figure 2: Analysis of issues relating to 'Access to food for carers'. Data source: Inductive theming of Better Together Interviews – 'Carers Support and Access to Food in Hospital' – August 2022 (n=26)

### Planning and Implementing Solutions

The four solutions to be implemented in 2023/2024 are:

- Implementation of a **designated delivery zone for food and grocery delivery** at Sydney Children's Hospital and The Children's Hospital at Westmead
- Install **vending machines with high quality healthy meals** and snacks for improved meal access
- Explore the potential for a **user pay system to access hospital provided food** delivered to the patient's bedside
- Provide **information about food options** for parents and carers whilst staying in hospital on admission

Strong project sponsorship and upcoming hospital redevelopments have enabled implementation planning to form part of an existing project governance structure. This has ensured key stakeholders are regularly informed of progress. Risks and issues are continually monitored by the project team and are escalated to project governance where required.



Image 2: Photo of patient and carer at SCH, 2022

### Sustaining change

The 'Carer Access to Food' survey will form part of the Sydney Children's Hospitals Network Patient Reported Experience Measures program.

A feedback loop between clinicians and the project team will be established to address any challenges raised with the implemented solutions.

### Conclusion

SCHN prioritises family centred care and recognises the vital role of parents and carers during a patient's stay in hospital.

Carers are key in supporting patients during their hospital stay regardless of a patient's age. NSW Health has opportunities to improve the support carers receive when staying in hospital with their loved one.

Existing state based forums and committees will be utilised to share key insights and learnings from proposed solutions, to enable other local health districts to apply and transfer solutions to other hospitals.

### Acknowledgments

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