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MEDIA RELEASE

Go-ahead for family-focused dementia project

People living with dementia will soon be able to enjoy happier meal times with their families thanks to a new 'Happy Eating Project' to be developed by not-for-profit aged care provider Benetas.

Funded by the Federal Government the 'Bon Appetito' 'Kali Orexi' *Happy Eating Pilot Project* will target families of Italian and Greek speaking backgrounds who have a family member with moderate dementia living in the western region of Melbourne.

Benetas CEO Sandra Hills says the aim is to try and help make mealtimes a more enjoyable experience for families living with dementia.

"Our bi-lingual carers will receive special training to work with families to introduce strategies to help make eating more enjoyable. These strategies include learning to stimulate appetite for the person with dementia, establishing routines, reducing distractions, simplifying cooking, and alleviating mealtime stress in the kitchen.

"Our experience tells us that mealtimes play an exceptionally important role in reducing social isolation, which is a major issue facing our ageing population. Food is also important in identifying with our culture and reliving memories. Families will be assisted to understand how their family member with dementia can be more involved in family life such as meal preparation and cleaning up which allows them to continue to make a contribution to the household."

The western region of Melbourne is a culturally and linguistically diverse population which continues to grow at a rapid pace. Estimates show there are over 5,000 individuals over the aged of 65 with dementia living in the area. Ms Hills says that while Benetas case managers currently arrange a vast variety of services for their clients, none are currently in a position to offer this sort of tailored, specialised support.

Benetas will trial the project with their current clients and families. The project has four key aims in the initial 12-month period: increase understanding of dementia; reduce stigma surrounding dementia; empower those who have dementia and to reduce their social isolation.

"We look forward to working closely with the Centre for Cultural Diversity in Ageing, Alzheimer's Australia Vic and community representatives from Greek and Italian backgrounds to ensure the project is a success," says Ms Hills.

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Benetas is a not-for-profit organisation, founded by the Anglican Diocese of Melbourne in 1948. Benetas provides quality aged care services for more than 2,000 older Victorians within its 12 residential care facilities and through its extensive community care programs that enable older people to stay at home with support. Benetas is also one of the leading providers of dedicated day and overnight respite services in Victoria.