

Italian Benevolent Foundation 50th Anniversary



Honouring 50 Years of Benevolence: The Legacy of the Italian Benevolent Foundation and Bene Aged Care

In 2025, the Italian Benevolent Foundation of South Australia Inc. (IBF) and its service arm, Bene Aged Care, celebrated a remarkable milestone: 50 years of continuous service to the ageing Italian and multicultural communities of South Australia. This golden anniversary marks not only the longevity of the organisation but also its enduring commitment to culturally sensitive care, community connection, and visionary leadership.

Origins Rooted in Community

Founded in 1974 by a passionate group of Italo-Australian doctors, business owners, and community leaders, the Foundation emerged in response to a pressing need: aged care services that honoured the language, traditions, and values of Italian elders. At a time when mainstream facilities lacked cultural nuance, the founders—led by Mr Tony Novello and inaugural Chairman Judge Pasquale Pirone—envisioned a village where ageing could be met with dignity, familiarity, and familial warmth.

The first facility, developed in St Agnes, was made possible through extraordinary personal sacrifice. Some board members offered their own homes as collateral to secure funding, a testament to the depth of their commitment. From these humble beginnings, the Foundation grew steadily, adding sites in Campbelltown, Burton, St Clair, Magill, Woodville North, and Hahndorf.

A Strategic Evolution: Bene Aged Care

In 2014, the organisation underwent a transformative rebranding. While the Italian Benevolent Foundation SA Inc. retained its role as the charitable and fundraising arm, all aged care services were unified under the new brand: Bene Aged Care – Aged Care, Italian Style. The name “Bene”, meaning “good” or “well” in Italian, reflects the organisation’s ethos of holistic wellness, respect, and cultural pride.

This strategic split allowed for clearer governance, enhanced marketing, and a refreshed identity that honoured tradition while embracing modernity. The new logo, incorporating the Foundation’s historic bell and healthcare-associated blue tones, symbolised continuity and renewal.

Leadership and Legacy

The Foundation’s journey has been shaped by visionary leaders. Dr Carmine De Pasquale, chairman from 1976 to 2010, oversaw its expansion from 40 places to over 400, with assets exceeding \$46 million. A psychiatrist, author, and recipient of multiple honours—including the Order of Australia Medal and *Grande Ufficiale Ordine della Stella della Solidarietà Italiana*—Dr De Pasquale’s legacy is woven into every facet of Bene’s philosophy.

Marie Alvino, solicitor and long-serving vice chair, succeeded Dr De Pasquale and steered the organisation through its rebranding and strategic acquisitions, including the purchase of Bene St Clair and the divestment of *Domus Operosa*.

Today, Bene thrives under the stewardship of Chairman Cavaliere Dr Antonio Cocchiaro AM, Vice Chairman Mr Silvio Iadarola, and CEO Andrew McFarlane. Dr Cocchiaro, a respected GP and advocate for multiculturalism, brings decades of experience and community leadership to the role.

Innovation and Impact

Over the years, Bene has pioneered numerous initiatives:

- Establishment of the IBF Healthcare College of South Australia
- Introduction of electronic documentation systems and governance committees
- Expansion into retirement living, with 70 independent units housing over 80 residents
- Strategic partnerships with UniSA, Carer Gateway, and the SA Innovation Hub
- Outreach to Chinese, Indian, Muslim, and Aboriginal communities, reflecting Bene's evolving multicultural mission

Despite sector-wide financial pressures, Bene remains fiscally robust—one of the few aged care providers in South Australia operating in surplus.

A Living Legacy

From its inception, the Italian Benevolent Foundation has embodied the spirit of community, sacrifice, and cultural pride. Its transformation into Bene Aged Care has not diluted its heritage but rather amplified its reach and relevance. As Bene enters its sixth decade, it continues to honour its founders' vision: to bring joy, dignity, and holistic care to older people from all walks of life.

For the Italian Historical Society of South Australia Inc., Bene's story is more than an institutional history—it is a living testament to the power of community, the resilience of migrants, and the enduring value of culturally grounded care.

Giuseppe (Joe) Geracitano
November 2025

