Select Committee Inquiry into Mental Health and Suicide Prevention - Submission 2021

Submitted to the Parliament's Select Committee on Mental Health and Suicide Prevention (March 2021).

Dietitians Australia supports significant reforms to the mental health system. Better care and support to all Australians is critical, including those suffering with mental illness.

The increasing recognition of the link between physical and mental health means it's critical to provide access to healthy food and nutrition care as part of mental health treatment. Improved access to nutrition and dietetic services is a key component of this. This requires government reform, funding and coordinated health care to make it a possibility.

Accredited Practising Dietitians (APDs) play a vital role in mental health treatment. They should be acknowledged for this. Working with an APD can help manage symptoms of physical and mental illness. An APD can help improve the health and participation in society of those with mental illness.

Early dietary intervention, with the help of an APD, helps prevent, treat and manage some common mental illnesses and disorders. Early intervention, alongside collaborative care, can reduce economic costs to individuals and communities. It can reduce the impact and severity of physical illness, on individuals and the economy.

Early intervention is particularly important in vulnerable groups including young people. When it comes to cost effectiveness, early intervention involving dietetics services benefits both the

individual and the economy. This should be a priority.

People with mental illness often have poor quality diets, and struggle to regulate their food intake. This leads to poor nutrition choices. Yet nutrition isn't often part of their care plans. Poor diet quality can contribute to physical illness, inflammation, stress and impaired brain function. It's critical to address this early on. There is growing evidence around the impact of nutrition and dietary patterns on mental health. This supports the importance of nutrition care in enhancing brain function and health.

To give people access to these services, there should be more funding for FTE positions for dietitians in government-funded mental health initiatives. APDs should be included in the Medicare Benefits Scheme (MBS) 'Better Access to Psychiatrists, Psychologists and General Practitioners' (Better Access) initiative, giving people access to APDs for 10 consultations in person or via Telehealth.

For more download our full submission.

Get in touch

If you have questions about this submission, contact us at policy@dietitiansaustralia.org.au