Dietitians essential in mental health care - Media release

It's time for Accredited Practising Dietitians to be recognised as a key profession in the management of mental health, says Dietitians Australia.

As the nation wraps up Mental Health Awareness Month, ensuring our country has a comprehensive and effective workforce that can adequately support Australia's rising rates of mental illness is a must.

"Nutrition support, as part of a person's mental health care plan, has been found to be most effective when it is delivered by a dietitian1," said Robert Hunt, CEO of Dietitians Australia.

"Australians nationwide must have timely access to skilled mental health professionals and we urge the government to acknowledge the need for dietetic services, particularly in prevention and early intervention of mental illness."

"Whether it's challenging eating practices for a person living with an eating disorder, supporting someone to manage the side-effects of their medication, helping a client to access nutritious foods or using medical nutrition therapy to help prevent and manage a mental illness – these are just some of the ways dietitians can make a difference."

But to see a real health change, the government needs to make it easier for Australians to see their dietitian via Medicare referral pathways and community-based government funded initiatives.

"With the government's draft National Mental Health Workforce strategy due to be finalised later this year, forgetting to focus on how to support Australians through food-based strategies, would be detrimental to our population's health," said Robert.

Investing in dietitians means savings across the healthcare system.

“With almost half of all Australians expected to experience a mental illness in their lifetime2, support from a dietitian is likely to result in reduced burden on the healthcare system and better quality of life for our population,” said Robert.

“Research shows that with support from a dietitian, people diagnosed with clinical depression were able to significantly reduce their mental health symptoms by making changes to their diet3.”

“These dietary changes are also likely to help reduce the risk of lifestyle related health conditions like heart disease and type 2 diabetes, as well as improve gut health.”

“We know that physical and mental health are intertwined, and we must have a workforce strategy that addresses overall health, rather than singling out these areas in isolation,” said Robert.

ENDS

If you think you may be experiencing a mental health illness, please reach out to your local healthcare team for support. For those based in Australia, 24-hour mental health support is available through Lifeline on 13 11 14 or Beyond Blue on 1300 224 636.

If you are seeking nutrition support, connect with an Accredited Practising Dietitian (APD) via our ‘Find a Dietitian’ search tool.

Media enquiries

For media enquiries and interviews, contact our Media Officer on 0409 661 920.

Note to editors: Dietitians Australia is the leading voice of nutrition in Australia, representing dietitians nationally and advocating for healthier communities. Accredited Practising Dietitian (APD) is the only national credential recognised by the Australian Government as the quality standard for nutrition and dietetics services in Australia.