Food is our most effective weapon in preventing chronic disease - Media release

The peak body for dietetics in Australia wants to see affordability and access to healthy food increase, along with better food literacy as part of the Government's new National Preventive Health Strategy, which closed for public comment this week.

It's the first time Australia has had a National Preventive Health Strategy. For the strategy to be effective in preventing chronic disease in Australia, it needs to prioritise the food and nutrition needs of all Australians, Robert Hunt, CEO of Dietitians Australia says.

Overall, Dietitians Australia agrees the proposed strategy is promising, but for it to be effective it needs to:

Focus on food literacy in schools: School age is a perfect time for kids to foster a positive relationship with food and develop skills to prepare food and plan meals. These are enablers for enjoying a nutritious diet over a lifetime.

Make healthier foods cheaper and easier to access: Healthy food needs to be accessible to everyone. Fruit, vegetables, and other nutritious foods must remain GST-free, keeping healthy food cheaper and more accessible than processed, energy dense, nutrient poor foods. The Health Star Rating system must be regularly evaluated to ensure Australians have the best information available to make a healthier choice when choosing packaged foods.

Boost investment in Australia's food production sector, focusing on healthier foods: The food supply needs to include more whole foods than highly processed foods, particularly foods with less saturated fats and added sugar. We also need to foster and invest in our local food production sector, with a focus on nutrition sensitive agriculture.

Foster and encourage social connections through food: Meal-times are ideal for bringing people together and fostering social connections.

Increase spending on preventive health: Dietitians Australia supports the Government's recommendation to increase spending on preventive health to 5% of total health expenditure. This will bring Australia in line with other international leaders in preventive health and help reduce overall long-term health spending.

Mr Hunt said the focus on national preventive health and nutrition was long overdue. This is the first time Australia has had a National Preventive Health Strategy, and it's been almost 30 years since Australia's National Nutrition Policy has been updated.

During this time, rates of diet-related chronic health conditions have continued to rise, and more than one in five Australians have been unable to access food required to meet their basic nutrition needs.

What we eat influences many common chronic health conditions, such as heart disease, type 2 diabetes and poor mental health.

"Just under half of Australian adults report having one or more chronic conditions. Without providing appropriate support, we face a society that will become overrun by the social and economic impacts of poor health," said Hunt.

He said Dietitians Australia supports the systemic changes proposed in the strategy that make it easier for Australians to adopt healthy diets.

"For too long, the responsibility has been placed on the individual. We must adapt our environments to ensure Australians are better supported to put their health first," Hunt said.

All life stages need to be included in preventive health programs, and governments need to recognise that there are many influences on health that are outside an individuals' control.

"Support for all Australians without judgement or stigma is crucial to encouraging our communities to be physically active and adopt healthy eating," said Hunt.

"Australians of all ages and backgrounds need access to nutritious food, and support to make healthy food choices every day," he said.

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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.