NDIS independent assessments forget that food fuels function - Media release

Dietitians Australia calls for the government to immediately cease the roll out of the independent assessment program as part of its proposed reforms to the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), in a bid to prevent, avoidable nutrition-related deaths of vulnerable Australians.

Under these changes, the independent assessment would review a person's function and use this as the basis to determine access and allocation of NDIS funding. Alarmingly, this would result in limited testing on food habits and nutrition status – a vital factor in function and overall wellbeing.

"Nutrition screening is an important step to help identify and provide support to those at risk of malnutrition. It's also a life-saving measure to detect those at immediate risk of death, due to swallowing ability, to eat safely and reduce the incidence of choking," said Kathryn Toohey, Accredited Practising Dietitian and Dietitians Australia's Disability Subject Matter Lead.

"People with disability have unique and complex food and nutrition needs, and it's vital these are adequately addressed to help them achieve their lifestyle and health goals."

Being well-nourished is influenced by many factors – including a person's food knowledge, ability to plan meals, shop, cook, store and prepare food safely as well as their physical ability to eat a meal. These must be reviewed as a part of nutrition screening to ensure appropriate support is provided as per an individual's needs.

“Consider a person with cerebral palsy who has swallowing difficulties and requires pureed food and thickened drinks to reduce choking risk,” said Kathryn.

“A multi-disciplinary allied health team works together, to ensure the right foods, supportive seating, and adaptive utensils are provided for the person’s needs. They also adjust this over time as their situation changes.”

However, the new assessment program simply addresses the function – whether a person can feed themselves, without identifying the surrounding supports required to facilitate this function. “While there is room for improvement in the NDIS, this change threatens to undermine the principles the NDIS was built upon,” said Kathryn.

Over 100 organisations and leaders in disability are also calling for the changes to be axed, as it will alter the personalised and individualised approach the current NDIS provides.

Dietitians are asking for a review of the current assessment system, and for solutions to be codesigned with people with disability, their family and supporters, to ensure funding is used to enhance physical, mental and social wellbeing and support active participation in the community.

“There are trained health professionals who are ready to support Australians to live to the best of their ability. We need a model of care that recognises this and makes it easier for NDIS participants to access the services they need,” said Kathryn.

ENDS

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.