Food first in aged care - Media release

Tackling malnutrition by elevating the importance of nutritious food for older Australians is Dietitians Australia's key focus at tomorrow's National Congress on Food, Nutrition, and the Dining Experience in Aged Care.

Hosted by the Department of Health and the Maggie Beer Foundation, Robert Hunt, Dietitians Australia CEO and Julie Dundon, one of Dietitians Australia's Aged Care Subject Matter Leads, will meet with other leaders in aged care to discuss critical issues facing the sector.

Mandatory malnutrition screening and minimum staff time standards for Accredited Practising Dietitians (APDs) in community and residential aged care are some of the recommendations being put forward by Dietitians Australia.

"We have a malnutrition crisis that is gripping older Australians. Recent research has revealed almost 4000 older Australians were hospitalised for malnutrition in just 12 months. This means many older Australians are not receiving adequate food for their needs, which is unacceptable," said Robert Hunt, CEO of Dietitians Australia.

"Mandatory malnutrition screening, together with regular re-screening, is vital to ensure aged care providers can take action to reduce the progression of malnutrition."

The role of a dietitian encompasses clinical care, menu design and improving the meal-time experience to increase food consumption. Allocating a minimum number of dietitian hours for each aged care resident is essential to ensure individually appropriate nutritious food is served and eaten.

A 'food first' approach is championed by dietitians. They do this by working with food service staff to maximise the nutritional value of meals by adding nourishing ingredients to the food served.

“We know that undertaking a food first approach to reducing malnutrition would save more than $80 million which would otherwise be spent on treatment. Adopting this approach is a must both for health, and for the bottom line.”

It is a basic human right for older Australians to have access to food that is nutritious, familiar, culturally and medically appropriate, and to eat appetising meals in an enjoyable dining environment.

“Not having a range of nutritious foods to choose from is neglect and elder abuse,” said Hunt.

“For example, many of us enjoy the familiarity and routine of eating a similar breakfast each day. Imagine eating one way for decades, only to have that option taken away when you enter aged care.”

“Dietitians can help providers find food solutions that meet every individual’s health needs and food preferences by working collaboratively with older Australians, catering staff and the healthcare team,” said Hunt.

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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.