Budget must prioritise nutrition for the nation's health - Media release

Dietitians Australia urges the Australian Federal Government to ensure the 2021-22 Budget provides adequate funding to support Australians to make appropriate food choices for their health.

This comes as part of 14 key recommendations submitted for consideration to the Treasury which includes increased access to dietetic care and investment in public health nutrition campaigns.

Telehealth has revolutionised access to healthcare over the past year, reducing several barriers. Continuing telehealth dietetic services as a permanent fixture to Medicare is vital to ensure all Australians can access high quality nutrition care.

"The option for dietetic support via telehealth, when appropriate, has been essential. Since the pandemic, we've seen a 300% uptake of dietetic services for eating disorder treatment delivered both in person and virtually," said Simone Austin, Accredited Practising Dietitian and Dietitians Australia's Senior Dietetic Advisor.

With the pandemic likely to have an on-going impact on many areas of heath, such as eating disorders and other mental health conditions, online access to dietetic services is a must.

"Poor nutrition is a major contributing factor to mental illness. Telehealth is a simple and often convenient way for Australians to see their dietitian, and telehealth dietetic services have been shown to be as effective as face-to-face services. Continuing the option for Medicare subsidised telehealth appointments is really a no-brainer."

“It was very promising to hear the announcement from the Minister of Health in late 2020 that telehealth would be a permanent fixture of healthcare. However, further details about what health services will be accessible via telehealth, and under what conditions, are yet to come.”

Other key asks include implementing mandatory malnutrition screening and undertaking a food first approach, rather than relying on supplements to reduce malnutrition in aged care.

“Investing in dietitian consultations and providing nourishing food in residential aged care would save more than $80 million which would be otherwise spent on malnutrition treatment, such as oral nutrition supplements, wound care and hospital admissions,” said Austin.

“Using a food first approach to reducing malnutrition also provides a more enjoyable mealtime experience – and you can’t put a price on the value of improving quality of life.”

Austin also emphasises this budget provides the chance for the Government to harness the current public interest in health prevention.

“COVID-19 brought change to all our lives and has seen many of us reassess our day-to-day habits. Now is the time to invest in food and nutrition public health campaigns, to help equip Australians with the knowledge and skills to make informed food choices for their health.”

“With the National Preventive Health Strategy and National Obesity Strategy due to be finalised, this is an ideal opportunity to communicate with public about how they can eat for their wellbeing.”

“We need to seize this chance to reduce the future economic impact poor diets will have on health care, through sharing food and nutrition messages that are relevant to all Australians,” said Austin.

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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.