New data strengthens call for mandatory malnutrition screening - Media statement

Hospitalisation data released today by the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety further emphasises Dietitians Australia's call for mandatory malnutrition screening and quarterly rescreening of aged care residents.

For the first time, hospitalisation rates for Australian adults aged over 65 years and living in residential aged care have been calculated at a national level.

This revealed in 2018-19, 1.9% (n = 3940) of hospitalisations were due to weight loss and malnutrition. Other reasons for hospitalisations such as falls, fractures and pressure injuries, are also influenced by poor nutrition.

"It is alarming that in one year almost 4000 hospitalisations were due to aged care residents not receiving adequate food for their needs, and poor nutrition likely contributed to many more," said Professor Judi Porter, Fellow of Dietitians Australia and one of Dietitians Australia's Aged Care Subject Matter Leads.

"Food is only nutritious if it is eaten. This is why we must have a national policy for nutrition care in aged care. The policy would address the whole food and nutrition spectrum, from regular malnutrition screening, upskilling of aged care staff, food choice, culturally and nutritionally appropriate menus and how to foster an enjoyable mealtime experience."

“It is unacceptable that older Australians are reaching the point of hospitalisation for malnutrition, which is a preventable condition,” said Porter. In a recent submission and position statements, Dietitians Australia outlines key recommendations and the economic benefit of tackling malnutrition.

By engaging Accredited Practising Dietitians (APDs) in residential aged care to champion a food-first approach, more than $80 million per year could be saved which would otherwise be spent on costly malnutrition treatment.

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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.