Taskforce must investigate link between malnutrition & COVID-19 deaths - Media release

Dietitians Australia is strongly urging the Australian Government's taskforce for COVID-19 deaths to investigate the direct link between malnutrition and the severity of the virus.

Chief Executive Officer of Dietitians Australia, Robert Hunt explains.

"Scientific reports have linked the severity of COVID-19 with older people who are malnourished[1].

"We also know that up to 50% of residents in aged care facilities were malnourished before COVID19, so it's critical to understand how current food and staff shortages are exacerbating this situation," Robert said.

Dietitians Australia has reported concerns about food shortages in aged care homes due to COVID-19 supply chain issues, and nursing organisations have confirmed that resident's meals are being missed due to staff shortages[2].

"We're devastated to see the current situation unfold and urge the Australian Government to implement key measures to secure the ongoing health of our elderly."

The organisation has identified three priorities to address the issue of malnutrition in aged care, including:

- Malnutrition screening be included in National Aged Care Mandatory Quality Indicator Program for both residential and in-home aged care.
- Mandating, as a condition of receiving the Basic Daily Fee supplement, that every Residential Aged Care home undergoes an annual on-site Menu and Mealtime Quality Assessment performed by an Accredited Practising Dietitian.
- Updating Australia's 30 year-old 1992 National Nutrition Policy to address food security into the future.

"We were pleased to hear that Minister Colbeck is considering a National Nutrition Strategy and hope that with his continued support these essential reforms will be considered as a priority," Robert said.

"Malnutrition has been a silent and faceless killer in our aged care sector for too many years. Only with the right support will we start to see this situation turn around."

ENDS

Robert Hunt is available for interview.

[1]Long-term effects of malnutrition on severity of COVID-19 | Scientific Reports (nature.com)

[2]Austrlaian Nursing & Midwifery Federation: Nursing organisations condemn Morrison Government for failures in aged care

Media enquiries

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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.