Dietitians demand accountability as people in aged care continue to lose weight - Media release

Following concerns about yesterday's Residential Aged Care Quality Indicators report, Dietitians Australia is calling on the Australian Government to implement urgent measures to increase accountability in the nation's residential aged care sector.

The report has revealed 12,512 people were recorded to have significant unplanned weight loss in the quarter to September 2021, adding concern to the fact that up to 50% of people in aged care are malnourished.

Chief Executive Officer of Dietitians Australia, Robert Hunt said, "since the government implemented the $10 basic daily fee supplement in July last year unplanned weight loss in residential aged care facilities has not shown significant improvement.

"We didn't believe this money was being spent on nutrition before today's report, and now we have evidence to prove it.

"Dietitians around the nation are still reporting grossly inadequate meals being served to aged care residents, and we predict this will only get worse with rising food prices and food insecurity.

"Malnutrition is rife in the residential aged care sector, affecting up to half of residents, and we're deeply concerned how recent pandemic-related events could be driving this statistic even further.

“Unplanned weight loss is just one indicator of malnutrition. A resident can still be malnourished and not lose weight which is why we need mandatory malnutrition screening in aged care.”

The National Aged Care Mandatory Quality Indicator Program was introduced by the Federal Government in 2019 following the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety. Measurements of the program include pressure injuries and unplanned weight loss, but not malnutrition.

Dietitians Australia points out that unplanned weight loss alone is not a reliable indicator of malnutrition.

The organisation is asking the government to embed preventive measures in the Quality Indicator program through malnutrition screening with minimum standards of documentation. And, as a condition of receiving the $10 basic daily supplement, that aged care homes should be subject to a mandatory annual assessment by an Accredited Practising Dietitian of the quality of meals that they’re serving residents.

“Malnutrition increases the risk of falls, pressure injuries, hospital admissions, COVID-19 infections and mortality which in turn increases costs in the aged care sector and the broader healthcare system.

“Mandatory malnutrition screening and elevating the quality of meals served to people in aged care will not only improve quality of life, but actually provide the nation with significant healthcare savings.”

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Robert Hunt is available for interview.

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.