More Australians prescribed mental health medication than ever - Media statement

This week's report by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) has revealed that more Australians are now prescribed medication for mental illness since records began in 2012, costing the nation $566 million in subsidised prescriptions.

With 4.4 million people prescribed mental health medication in the year to June 2020, Dietitians Australia is calling on the government to help support the nation's mental health through preventive measures such as dietary intervention.

"Current available evidence points strongly to the cost effectiveness of dietary interventions for prevention, treatment and management of mental illnesses," said Chief Executive Officer of Dietitians Australia, Robert Hunt.

"Yet the government still doesn't recognise the important role that food and nutrition has on mental health and wellbeing."

The AIHW report revealed 29.4 million antidepressants were prescribed in the year - an overwhelming representation of overall mental health related prescriptions at 72%.

Accredited Practising Dietitian, Dr Rachelle Opie explains how both mental illness and associated physical illnesses can be cost-effectively prevented or treated through dietary support.

“Evidence from randomised control trials around the world have proven dietary interventions significantly reduce symptoms of mental illness, including depression,” Dr Opie said.

“In one study, remission of depression was achieved for 32% of individuals who received a 12-week dietary intervention.

“This is just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to understanding how mental and physical illnesses are intrinsically linked to food and nutrition.”

Like many dietitians across the country, Rachelle is frustrated that access to dietetic services is not included in the Medicare Benefit Scheme (MBS) items relating to mental illness other than eating disorders.

“Introducing MBS items would improve equity of access to nutrition services for people with mental illnesses who are at-risk of poor diet and physical illness and often have the least capacity to pay for private services.”

ENDS

Interview opportunities:

- Dr Rachelle Opie – Accredited Practising Dietitian specialising in mental health
- Robert Hunt – Chief Executive Officer, Dietitians Australia

Case studies are available on request.

AIHW tally of people receiving mental health related prescriptions

2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
3.6m	3.8m	3.9m	4m	4.1m	4.2m	4.3m	4.4m

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.