Dollars on aged care food must deliver on dietary needs

Dietitians Australia is demanding the Government move immediately to mandate a requirement for every residential aged care home to have their menus and meals assessed by a dietitian on-site at least once a year.

It comes as the latest quarterly data on food and nutrition spending in residential aged care found 25 percent of homes are spending less than $10 per resident a day on food.

“Given the rising cost of food and produce – these figures are very concerning,” Dietitians Australia CEO Robert Hunt said.

“Expenditure on food doesn’t tell the full story, but with the latest significant unplanned weight loss figures at 13,490 residents, it’s clear not every home is putting adequate funds towards nutritious food, “he said.

“Given the current inflation rates, it would be very difficult to provide residents with good quality meals and adequate nutrition for less than $10 per person per day.

“It is true; you cannot put an exact dollar figure down to guarantee a meal will meet the unique nutrition needs of older people.

“The only way you can do that – is by ensuring menus and meals have the input of an accredited practising dietitian.

“Dietitians have a critical role to play in transforming the nutritional balance of food served to our loved ones in aged care.

“It may surprise Australians – there is currently nothing in place to guarantee menus developed and meals cooked and served to aged care residents will be assessed by an accredited practising dietitian.

“This is the bare minimum next critical step this Government must take if they genuinely want to turn the tides on malnutrition in Australian aged care for good.

“However, we are starting to see green shoots in recent Department level reforms, including proposed changes to the Aged Care Quality Standards to bring in a whole new standard on food and nutrition.”

“Our members who have worked in the sector for over thirty years are feeling hopeful that meaningful transformation on food and nutrition in Australian aged care is underway.

“Cooks, chefs and food service staff deserve all the support they can get – and a minimum of one on-site visit per year from an accredited practising dietitian will give them the evidence-based advice they need to ensure their menus and meals meet the nutritional requirements of older Australians.

“We know there are providers out there committed to improving the food experience for residents.

“It is heartening to see in the latest reportsome of the creative and innovative approaches providers are taking, including kitchen gardens and food waste initiatives.

“There are providers out there who voluntarily choose to engage accredited practising dietitians as part of their food service delivery, and we congratulate these providers and demand more take up this proactive step.”

Media enquiries

For media enquiries and interviews, contact0409 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.