"Make us more accessible through Medicare," Dietitians plead

As we approach the 40th anniversary of the Medicare system in Australia next month, Dietitians say it's time for the scheme to ensure dietetic and nutrition supports are far more accessible to Australians in need.

Poor diet is the third leading risk factor for illness, disease and premature death in Australia. A third of the average Australian food intake is made up of foods high in sugar, salt and saturated fats.

"More Australians will be empowered with the individualised advice they need to make behavioural changes and adjust their food intake for the prevention, treatment and management of chronic diseases if they are granted better access to accredited practising dietitians through Medicare," Dietitians Australia Acting Chief Executive Officer Natalie Stapleton said.

"Currently, under Medicare's Chronic Disease Management plans, subsidised sessions are capped at a total of five for the year, for access to thirteen allied health professions in the scheme.

"Five sessions or fewer do not meet best practice guidelines for supporting people to make meaningful behaviour changes to improve their food intake and health outcomes.

"We're calling on the Government to expand the number of subsidised allied health sessions under Chronic Disease Management plans to ten this anniversary year.

"Supporting people with personalised advice on their food intake and counselling to enable behaviour change that will allow them to achieve their health and wellbeing goals can often

require extended consultation times.

“Certainly, the first time someone meets their accredited practising dietitian, we want to allow at least a 50-minute session which is not currently available for subsidies under Medicare like other counselling professions including psychologists and social workers.

“The evidence showing the power of food when it comes to preventing and treating mood disorders and mental illness is mounting, yet access to accredited practising dietitians is not yet included within mental health care plans under Medicare’s Better Access Initiative.

“Providing Medicare subsidised access to dietitians for Australians living with mood disorders and mental illness will better enable those in need with support to optimise their food intake, hydration and harness the benefits of nutrition therapy to improve symptoms and in the case of acute depressive disorders even potentially experience remission.

“We’ve also long been recommending the Government include item numbers under Medicare for dietetic services for children with autism, pervasive developmental disorder, and disability.

“We’re looking forward to working with the Government on the next chapters of Medicare’s history books, to improve the health and wellbeing of Australians,” Ms Stapleton said.

For media enquiries and interviews, contact our Media Manager Amy Phillips on 0409 661 920.

Note to Editors: Dietitians Australia is the leading voice in nutrition and dietetics, 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.