There’s more we can do for mental health in Australia – and it starts with what we eat

What we eat has a profound impact on the mind, body and brain, yet the power of nutrition and dietetic supports remain largely underutilised within Australia’s mental health care system.

The nation’s peak body for dietetic and nutrition professionals, Dietitians Australia, has released the premier guide to evidence on how nutrition therapy can be harnessed to tackle the spectrum of mental health challenges faced nationwide.

The Dietitians Australia: Nourishing the Mind, Body and Brain Evidence Brief 2024 details the evidence-based solutions for better integration of dietetic and nutrition services into Australia’s health care system to shake up the way we manage mental health conditions across the nation.

“Our health care system needs to evolve to manage the often-complex needs of people living with mental health conditions.

“That includes ensuring Accredited Practising Dietitians take the leading role within multidisciplinary teams when it comes to providing effective, evidence-based dietary therapy for the prevention, treatment and management of mental health conditions their symptoms and commonly co-occurring physical illnesses,” Dietitians Australia President Tara Diversi said.

“The brief highlights the emerging evidence that has found making changes to the quality of food intake, can lead to the remission of depressive symptoms in some people.

“Australians must be supported with food and nutrition guidance to prevent occurrences of mental health conditions, with evidence showing eating a diet that isn’t made up of nutritious foods can increase the risk of developing mood and anxiety disorders.

“There are limited pathways for Australians facing mental health challenges to access nutrition therapy and dietetic services through the Medicare system.

“We’ve been calling on the Government to create avenues through Medicare and other funding programs to support Australians with depression, mood disorders and severe mental illness to access individual and group consultations with Accredited Practising Dietitians as part of a holistic and truly multidisciplinary approach to care.

“Currently there are only limited Medicare item numbers for people with eating disorders and other chronic health conditions to access an Accredited Practising Dietitian for mental health care.
“Mental health conditions cost the economy upwards of $70 billion dollars a year from lost productivity.

“The personal and societal impact cannot be quantified, but is an enormous load for many Australians' who live with and support people with mental health conditions.

“Dietitians stand ready to play a poignant role in transforming the way we manage mental health care in this country and will continue to advocate for ways we can better nourish the minds, bodies and brains of all Australians.

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.