Dietitians call on the Government to raise the standards set for nutrition in Early Childhood Centres

Dietitians Australia is calling on the Government to focus on raising the nutrition standards set for Australian Early Childhood Centres, as a priority action to improve the nutrition quality of food consumed by children.

It comes as the latest AIHW National Health Survey data shows 96 percent of Australian children still aren't eating the recommended daily intake for fruit and vegetables and are eating well above the recommended limits of foods high in salt, sugar and fat.

"This trend continues to concern us, we must take action to set our children up for a nourished future," Dietitians Australia President Tara Diversi said.

"Nutrition is fundamental in the first six years of a child's life, particularly when it comes to their growth and brain development.

It's estimated over half of all Australian children spend time in Early Childhood Education Centres around the country for the equivalent of both part time and full-time hours each week, eating breakfast, lunch snacks and even dinners.

"This is the place where many Australian children will consume most of their weekly nutrition," Dietitians Australia President Tara Diversi said.

"It's also where they will start developing their eating habits and cultivating their relationship with food.

“There is a major opportunity to transform the food available in Early Childhood Education Centres in Australia, to ensure they are places where children thrive when it comes to their nutrition intake.

“There are currently no nationally consistent guidelines for nutrition in Early Childhood Education Centres, and there is no guarantee each centre engages an Accredited Practising Dietitian to support their menu and meal planning.

“We are calling on the Government to prioritise renewing the Quality Standards for Early Childhood Education Centres to include stronger standards on nutrition management, supportive mealtime environments and embed more stringent action on managing allergies.

“Staff and cooks need to be able to leverage the support of Accredited Practising Dietitians, for easy access to evidence-based nutrition guidance, enabling them to ensure nutritionally and culturally adequate meals are being served to children.

“Dietitians in Early Childhood Education Centres will provide additional practical support for Australian parents and caregivers to ensure they are equipped and informed on how to embrace nutrition principles as part of the preparation of meals for children at home.

“Families and carers of children with disability, particularly those who struggle to access dietitians through the healthcare system will have another way to benefit from dietetic support, when dropping up and picking up their children from care.

“With the rollout of the Australian Governments Early Years Strategy about to get underway, now is the time for us to be having a national conversation on nutrition and how critical it is to ensure the best possible outcomes when it comes to our children’s growth and development.

“Dietitians Australia, Accredited Practising Dietitians and nutrition professionals look forward to working closely with the Government to ensure Australian children are well supported with their nutrition for their long-term health and wellbeing.

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.