Dietitians Australia

Commitment to free school lunches in Queensland must be backed with a nutrition guarantee

Dietitians Australia calls on all parties ahead of the Queensland State Election to ensure that any school food programs and initiatives rolled out under the new Government are well-backed with a strong nutrition guarantee.

The peak body for dietetic and nutrition professionals in Australia's President says establishing strong nutrition foundations early in life is critical to ensuring children cultivate a positive relationship with food for healthy growth.

"There is no denying we need to strengthen efforts to improve the nutrition future and the health and wellbeing of children, not only in Queensland but across the country," Dietitians Australia President Tara Diversi said.

"When children have access to regular, nutritious meals, it positively impacts their cognitive abilities, behaviour, emotional well-being, and overall health, contributing to their ability to engage in effective learning.

"Whether you are family in Badu, Bundaberg or Brisbane - you deserve a guarantee that if food is being served to your primary school-aged children it is nutritious and meets their taste and preference needs.

"However, providing nutritious meals in the school environment is an incredibly challenging and nuanced task that requires a unique approach in each school.

“IT must be backed with the additional support of a dedicated professional workforce, including dietitians, to ensure its success.

“If done well, these initiatives are one way parents can be supported and assured their children are provided with nutritious lunches during the school week to help them grow, thrive and develop.

“Dietitians Australia wants any public investment in school food provision to have a nutrition guarantee, which is why we have been calling on the newly elected Government to guarantee all Queensland public schools have fortnightly access to dietitians, to visit the school in person and support co-designed nutrition programs.

“Dietitian numbers must be boosted within any service provider engaging with schools, including Health and Wellbeing Queensland, Queensland Association of School Tuckshops and NGOs including Nutrition Australia Queensland, to ensure nutrition initiatives are integrated and successfully embedded, to support the unique needs of each school community.

Dietitians engaged in school-based nutrition support initiatives will:

- Support schools with on-site menu and meal planning for nutrition guidance on food provision initiatives
- Support teachers to integrate food and nutrition literacy into their programming
- Provide strategic support for teachers, volunteers and the school community to educate students on nutrition without promoting body weight stigma
- Work with the school community and service providers including Health and Wellbeing Queensland and Queensland Association of School Tuckshops to co-design and implement context-specific food and nutrition initiatives
- Collaborate with other health care providers or school staff within schools to ensure that children receive personalised off-site nutrition support when needed.

“We welcome the spotlight on school food and nutrition initiatives at election time, but investment in school nutrition must be sustainable and continuous and delivered in a way that ensures children are well supported to learn nourished and well."

For media enquiries and interviews, contact our Media Manager 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.