New ACT Government must boost support for nutrition in the Territorys early childhood education centres

Dietitians Australia and Nutrition Australia ACT are calling for the incoming Territory Government to prioritise the nutrition future of the Territory's children by boosting nutrition support services available to early childhood education and care services.

Over half of all children in the ACT attend early childhood education and care centres, where many will consume most of their meals within a working week.

Yet currently, in the Territory, there is no continuous Government funded nutrition support service, enabling a guarantee that ensures food served in these centres meets nutrition quality standards.

"Nutrition is foundational in the first five years of a child's life, particularly for growth and brain development," Dietitians Australia CEO Magriet Raxworthy said.

"Early childhood centres in the ACT host the opportunity to generate a huge impact on the nutrition quality of the food children in the Territory are eating – Monday to Friday.

"Setting up strong foundations with nutrition at this stage of life is critical and shapes the child's ability to develop positive relationships with food that help establish long-term

healthy eating habits," Ms Raxworthy said.

"It has been over a decade since there has been a considered investment in nutrition supports in early childhood centres in the ACT," Nutrition Australia ACT CEO Leanne Elliston said.

"This is not the case in other states including NSW, Victoria and Tasmania where Government-supported nutrition services exist for early childhood education centres and can be equitably accessed," Ms Elliston said.

The organisations are calling on the incoming ACT Government to invest in a dedicated nutrition support service for the Territory's early childhood education services, to assist staff, educators, cooks and chefs with evidence-based nutrition information and support from accredited practising dietitians.

"This includes ensuring there is a requirement for a dietitian to visit every centre in the ACT at least once a year to ensure infants and children have access to nutritious meals and snacks that meet their needs.

"We also want to empower educators with evidence-based strategies that provide positive, play-based food learning experiences which can be embedded within the curriculum. " Ms Elliston said.

"As part of the boost to nutrition in childcare, the ACT Government must ensure annual nutrition and food handling training is continuously funded and provided for all educators in ECEC services and delivered by dietitians on-site.

"This will make sure children are not only getting the right foods but that they're being prepared and served in a safe, hygienic way and to ensure that each centre has the support they need to meet their obligations under the National Standards for ECECs.

"By prioritising and investing in nutrition for early childhood education and care in the ACT now, we're investing in the future health and wellbeing of the next generation of Territorians," Ms Elliston said.

For full details of Dietitians Australia and Nutrition Australia ACT's priorities for the new ACT Government, read our briefing paper.

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.