Dietitians Australia issues a national plea to place dietitians alongside all weight loss drug prescriptions

Dietitians Australia has today launched a national call to action to the Australian Government, pleading for immediate steps to be taken to ensure that anyone prescribed the weight loss drugs for any purpose is also supported with access to a dietitian.

The peak body has announced the call this afternoon at Australian Parliament House, urging the Government and health policy makers to heed caution as pharmaceutical manufacturers push to expand the use of GLP-1RA medicines beyond diabetes management in Australia.

“We must not overlook the importance of nutrition when it comes to the safe use of these medicines,” Dietitians Australia President Dr Fiona Willer said.

“We cannot continue to risk handing out prescriptions for these medications, without adequate wraparound care for people, including personalised medical nutrition therapy from

a dietitian before, during and following the use of the medicine.

“Where a prescription for weight loss medicine is placed in an Australian’s hand, for any purpose, a letter of referral to a dietitian should be placed in the other hand.

“GLP-1RA medicines fundamentally alter people’s appetite, and this makes it challenging to ensure they get the nutrition they need.

“Eating well is critical, absorbing adequate nutrition from food is critical, even when taking a medicine that suppresses one’s appetite,” Dr Willer said.

“Without a dietitian’s support, you can be at significant risk of malnutrition, loss of muscle and bone mass and over the longer term, risk of developing a disordered pattern of eating or potentially a fear of food or eating itself.

“If people aren’t supported with long-term behaviour change, and enabled to self-manage their nutrition, they are destined to end up with poorer health outcomes than they started with.

“There are many exemplary examples of safe and effective patient care in Australia, where people are using these medicines for therapeutic purposes, well supported and guided by their GP and

accredited practising dietitian,” Dietitians Australia Chief Executive Officer Magriet Raxworthy said.

“But our current Medicare funding limitations often leave people in gridlock, left without affordable access to the nutrition guidance and counselling they need from a dietitian to support every stage of their weight concern experience when using weight loss-inducing

medicine.

“We are seeing more and more global examples where people at higher body weight and size, living with multiple co-morbidities, are being given government-funded access to these weight loss medicines.

“If and when the Australian Government decides to follow suit, they absolutely must make sure that this investment is sound with sustainable results by including funded dietetic care.

“According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare data, 66% of Australian adults are now living with overweight and obesity.

“The AIHW has listed obesity as the leading risk factor for burden of disease in Australia,” Ms Raxworthy said.

“Obesity is a complex health issue that requires comprehensive solutions - it is not just about losing weight, it is about gaining health,” Chair of the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners Obesity Management Specific Interest Group, Dr Terri-Lynne South said.

“Dietitians play a key role in the use of GLP-1RA medication as in helping patients to maximise health benefits and minimise medication and weight loss side effects.

“Better access to nutritional care in Australia is critical to ensure Australians using these medications receive the comprehensive support they need,” Dr South said.

“Any further Government investment in pharmacotherapy, with potential for uptake from such a significant proportion of the population, must be undertaken with extreme care and consideration,” Dietitians Australia President Dr Fiona Willer said.

“We urge the Government to lay the foundations for safe and effective weight-related supports in this country now.

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.