South Australian children deserve safe and nutritious food at Early Childhood Education and Care Centres - Media release

Dietitians Australia is urging all candidates contesting the South Australian election to pledge their commitment to better equipping the State's Early Childhood Education and Care sector with the tools, knowledge and support needed to guarantee safe and nutritious food for children in care.

In South Australia, there are currently no consistent, mandatory statewide nutrition and allergy standards in place, and no publicly funded support for providers to improve their food service to children in care.

That's despite South Australian children spending on average more than 30 hours a week in early learning, where they are likely to eat their daily breakfast, lunch, snacks and even dinner.

"With the roll out of 3-year-old preschool, rising awareness of current standards of care and significant investment, we must seize the opportunity to simultaneously enhance nutrition and food safety in early childhood education and care centres in South Australia," Dietitians Australia Chief Executive Officer, Magriet Raxworthy said.

"This will have a direct and significant impact on the nutritional value of what young South Australians eat every single week.

“Nutrition in the early years of life is foundational for a child’s brain development, their learning capacity, energy and overall health wellbeing, yet under the current framework, there is no guarantee that the meals served in South Australian Early Education and Care Centres are consistently nutritionally adequate, age and allergen appropriate.

“There are currently no mandated requirements for staff in the sector to be trained in food allergen and anaphylaxis risk prevention and management, this is a critical health and safety priority that must be acted on,” Chief Executive Officer of the National Allergy Council Dr Sandra Vale said.

South Australia has had no government-funded nutrition initiative supporting early learning services since the defunding of the successful Start Right Eat Right program in 2013.

Dietitians Australia is calling on all candidates to pledge their commitment to:

- Enabling policies and funding that allow dedicated accredited practising dietitian support to be accessible for all South Australian ECECs through South Australian health networks
- Mandate allergen and anaphylaxis training for all staff working with children
- Appointing a designated lead agency responsible for coordinating and publicly reporting on early childhood food and nutrition

“Early learning services cannot be expected to manage complex nutrition, menu planning and allergy risks alone, they need consistent expert support that is best provided by accredited practising dietitians.

“Committing to dietetic and nutrition support for the sector now is a practical way the South Australian Government can help children from Adelaide, Ceduna to Mt Gambier to Port Augusta and beyond have access to safe, nutritious food in their critical early learning years.

For interviews please contact Media Manager Amy Phillips on 0409 661 920.