Dietitians Australia

Australians are missing out on basic nutrition while up to $21 billion nutrition-related disease cost burden grows

New national nutrition data has revealed a significant number of Australians are not meeting their basic nutrition requirements, while up to 21 billion dollars is spent on managing chronic disease linked to nutrition-related risk factors.

Dietitians Australia is calling for a major national rethink of how nutrition is supported across the country, urging coordinated structural change to better support Australians to achieve and sustain good nutrition.

The peak body for dietetic and nutrition professionals in Australia has today launched its 10-year Strategic Direction at Australian Parliament House, Reimagining Nutrition and Dietetics for a Better Australia: Towards 2036, setting out a national strategy to enable, empower, elevate and embed dietitians and nutrition across health, food and social systems.

“This $21 billion dollar nutrition related burden of disease price tag is a strong indicator of far deeper nutrition issues in Australia,” Dietitians Australia President Dr Fiona Willer said.
“$1 in every $5 spent in a calendar year can be attributed to a nutrition-related risk factor.
“This reflects the broader conditions people are living in, and how difficult it has become for Australians to navigate food, understand nutrition, and manage their health in everyday life.

“Putting food on the table is becoming more expensive, Australians are exposed to widespread misinformation and misleading marketing, and making the choice of which foods to buy increasingly complex.

“Without meaningful change in how we support Australians with nutrition including improving access to personalised, evidence-based care, it will remain difficult for people to make and sustain healthy choices.

“There is a desperate disconnect between the power of nutrition and the value of dietetic support, and how Australians can access that in their everyday lives.

According to the latest data from the ABS, including the first update on Australian nutrient intake in over 10 years:

- More than 60% of Australians are not meeting calcium requirements
- Almost half of men are not meeting zinc needs
- Nearly half of women aged 18–49 are not meeting iron requirements
- Two in three adults exceed recommended sodium intake
- 96% of Australians are not eating enough vegetables, with intake continuing to decline

“We are also seeing food insecurity rising at the same time, 3.5 million Australian households are struggling to put food on the table with many skipping meals, reducing fresh food intake, or going entire days without eating.

“We cannot morally accept hunger and malnutrition in Australia.

“This nutrition problem is not one that Australians should have to tackle on their own without support. This is a national nutrition problem that must be dealt with.

“We have an opportunity to intervene earlier, prevent disease, and reduce long-term costs but only if we increase Australians access to nutrition support more effectively in society, and fundamentally shift how we act on embedding the foundations of good nutrition across our societal structures.

Vice-President of Dietitians Australia, Professor Lauren Ball, said dietitians are essential to improving how Australia responds to nutrition-related challenges.

“Dietitians enhance how prevention, treatment and policy work together ensuring nutrition is embedded where it has the greatest impact,” Professor Ball said.

“We work alongside doctors, nurses, pharmacists and allied health professionals to ensure nutrition underpins prevention, treatment and recovery at every stage.

“But our contribution and impact go far beyond healthcare. Dietitians are strengthening Australia’s food regulatory systems, shaping better early education outcomes, boosting workforce productivity and leading the shift toward more sustainable ways to eat and source food.

“We acknowledge, this is not something any one profession or sector can solve alone.

“It requires a more connected, deliberate approach to how we improve nutrition across Australia from early intervention through to long-term care, and across the environments people live, learn and work in.

“The evidence is there, the cost of inaction is too high, the opportunity for impact is significant and we simply can’t wait any longer to act.

For interviews with Dietitians Australia President Dr Fiona Willer and Dietitians Australia Vice-President Professor Lauren Ball, please contact Media Manager Amy Phillips on 0409 661 920.