NDIS reform must not leave people with disability without vital support, dietitians warn

Dietitians Australia says cost-cutting efforts to secure the long-term sustainability of the NDIS must not limit access to essential nutrition and dietetic supports that build and maintain functional capacity for people with disability, or shift pressures onto other parts of Australia's health and care system.

The peak body for nutrition and dietetic professionals in Australia is urging the Australian Government to ensure changes of this scale are carefully designed – engaging the allied health sector in meaningful co-design – rather than shifting unmet need from one part of the health and care systems to another.

"Reducing access to supports within the NDIS doesn't reduce participants' needs," Dietitians Australia President Dr Fiona Willer said.

"It just shifts pressure onto primary care, aged care, and hospitals, including emergency departments, where we know there's already chronic underfunding and significant structural reform needed.

"Recent comments from Minister Butler have suggested that a lack of allied health workforce capacity in aged care was a result of overservicing the disability market.

"The reality is, dietitians have been advocating for decades for changes to funding arrangements that incentivise aged care providers to engage Accredited Practising Dietitians

or other allied health professionals as part of routine aged care.

“Data released by Stewart Brown has shown that funding for allied health care in residential aged care has halved, from 8 minutes per resident per day in 2022 to just 4 minutes in 2025.

“Our members are also reporting NDIS participants are presenting to emergency departments with serious tube feeding complications and acute nutrition crises – issues that can and should be managed at home and in community through dietetic support.

“Without access to allied health at the right place, at the right time, including dietetic supports for people with disability, we will see even more cases of malnutrition, preventable hospitalisations and further loss of independence.

Dietitians Australia also points to a lack of comprehensive national allied health workforce data – something long advocated for – meaning such Minister Butler’s reform suggestions are not evidence-based.

“Australia’s very first National Allied Health Workforce Strategy is still only in draft form, so we currently can’t substantiate such a major suggested shift in workforce distribution,” Dr Willer said.

“If the Government takes kneejerk structural adjustments, NDIS participants will be at an increased risk of losing their vital allied health therapy supports, and the Government is at risk of permanently losing specialised disability therapy support expertise and potential loss of the country’s most cost-effective health professionals from the broader health and social care eco-system.

“We’re calling on the Government to engage meaningfully with the allied health sector to ensure NDIS reforms protect Australia’s priority populations – the door is open for constructive dialogue with the Minister for Health, Ageing, Disability and the NDIS, let’s get this right together.”

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