Nutrition-related chronic disease is costing Australia billions – the Budget must respond

Dietitians Australia is calling on the Australian Government to use the 2026–27 Federal Budget to take meaningful action on diet-related disease – which remains one of the most significant and fastest-growing pressures on Australia's health system.

The peak body for Australia's 9,000-strong dietetic profession has outlined 12 recommendations across primary care, aged care, disability, workforce and public education in itspre-Budget submission.

“Consecutive governments have continued to fail to invest in food and nutrition initiatives that prevent illness, and without coordinated investment, a critical window to shift the population’s health will be lost,” said Dietitians Australia President Dr Fiona Willer.

“Nutrition-related disease isn’t a future risk – it’s already overwhelming our health system at an estimated cost of up to $21 billion annually, and it’s time for urgent action.

“Poor diet is the third-leading risk factor for preventable illness, yet we continue to under-invest in the workforce, services and initiatives that could turn that around.

“Dietitians and their nutrition interventions are a practical, scalable, cost-effective solution to Australia’s chronic healthcare delivery crisis.”

Central to Dietitians Australia's submission is an expansion of Medicare's Chronic Disease Management program to a minimum of 12 dedicated dietetic sessions annually, up from the

current five-session cap shared across all allied health disciplines.

New pressures are also reshaping primary care, with the rapid uptake of GLP-1 medicines introducing nutritional risks that many Australians remain largely unaware of.

“We know we have over 400,000 Australians choosing to use GLP-1 medications in Australia, but without access to dietetic support before, during and after use, those taking the drugs face higher nutritional risk,” Dr Willer said.

“More than one in five patients on these medicines develop nutrient deficiencies within a year. That's not a side effect we should accept as inevitable – it's a gap that dietitians are skilled and able to close, if funded.”

In aged care, Dietitians Australia is calling for investment in multidisciplinary team infrastructure, a dedicated reform-monitoring unit, and a departmental helpline to support providers as they navigate the new *Aged Care Act*.

“Dietitians are still being excluded from care planning for older Australians, despite the evidence being unambiguous,” Dr Willer said.

“Malnutrition in aged care is preventable, and good nutrition is not just about health; it’s also about quality of life, enjoyment and dignity.”

The peak body is also joining other health peaks in calling for $60 million over 4 years for a national public health nutrition mass-media campaign, expanded Commonwealth Prac Payments for dietetics students, and a national integration framework to place dietitians in schools and early childhood settings.

"We’re not asking the Australian Government to do anything new or untested," Dr Willer said.

"We’re asking it to invest in solutions we already know work – dietitians are a practical, scalable, cost-effective solution to keep Australia’s healthcare costs low, while helping Australians thrive.”

For more, read the full pre-Budget submission.

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