Response to the Public consultation on the Australian Dementia Clinical Practice Guidelines

Dietitians Australia supports the development of evidence-based guidelines and commends the Guideline Development Group for the comprehensive consideration of post-diagnostic care, rehabilitation, palliative care and behavioural symptoms in people living with dementia.

Nutrition is relevant across the continuum of dementia care, including risk reduction, post-diagnostic care, rehabilitation, management of feeding and swallowing difficulties, behavioural symptom management, frailty prevention, maintenance of function, and end-of-life care (Volkert et al., 2024).

Dietitians Australia encourages greater recognition of nutrition and hydration as important components of holistic dementia care throughout the guideline.

Dementia may affect appetite, recognition of food and drink, hunger and thirst recognition, swallowing function, food intake and the ability to self-feed. People living with dementia may also experience confusion around meals, reduced interest in eating, food refusal, difficulties recognising utensils, altered eating behaviours and challenges participating in social and mealtime activities. These changes may contribute to reduced nutritional intake, dehydration, weight loss and diminished quality of life. Recent Australian evidence suggests that approximately 27% of people living with dementia in long-term care are malnourished, 57% are at risk of malnutrition and almost 80% are either malnourished or at risk of malnutrition (Perry, Walton & Lambert, 2023).

Nutrition-related issues are common, clinically significant, and addressed throughout the guideline. Therefore, the profession with recognised expertise in nutrition assessment and medical nutrition therapy should be explicitly included within multidisciplinary dementia care.

These findings highlight the importance of recognising nutrition and hydration throughout the dementia care journey and support greater visibility of Accredited Practising Dietitians within dementia care pathways.

To learn more, please download our full submission.