

Diet-related chronic disease is Australia's number 1 killer yet dietitian students ignored in Prac Payments expansion

Dietitians Australia has welcomed the federal government's move to expand Commonwealth Prac Payments to a wider group of allied health students, but says the exclusion of dietetics from the list is a missed opportunity at a time when diet-related disease has overtaken smoking as Australia's leading health risk.

From 1 July 2027, students studying clinical psychology, physiotherapy, occupational therapy, speech pathology, paramedicine, radiography, pharmacy, rehabilitation therapies, audiology and podiatry will become eligible for the \$338.60-a-week Commonwealth Prac Payment while on mandatory placement. Dietetics students remain excluded.

Dietitians Australia Chief Executive Officer Magriet Raxworthy said the omission was difficult to reconcile with the government's own rationale for the scheme.

"Placement poverty is real, and it pushes good students out of health careers before they even qualify," Ms Raxworthy said.

“Dietetics students complete the same unpaid, mandatory clinical hours as the ten professions now covered by this expansion. There is no clear reason they have been left out for the 800 hours they complete over their placement.”

Dietitians Australia is calling on the government to add dietetics to the Commonwealth Prac Payment scheme when it reviews eligible degrees, and to fund a national workforce strategy that closes the growing gap between disease burden and dietitian numbers.

Dietitians Australia President Dr Fiona Willer said the dietitians’ exclusion sent the wrong signal about where the nation's health priorities lie.

"Dietary-related risks are already among the top three contributors to Australia’s disease burden. Yet the profession best placed to address and prevent this isn't considered essential enough for the same support we're giving the other 10 disciplines,” Dr Willer said.

“Access to Accredited Practicing Dietitians is already stretched, and this decision impacts the pipeline of the workforce we need to respond to that burden over the next decade.”

Dietitians Australia said the profession’s workforce gap of 15 dietitians for every 100,000 people has barely moved in four decades. Most Australians who see a dietitian through Medicare get one funded consultation a year. Clinical best practice for chronic disease management calls for up to 12.

“To ensure the Commonwealth Prac Payment is appropriately building the pipeline of allied health professionals to meet the nation’s health needs, we need a regular, ongoing review of all the allied professions against workforce shortages and the changing burden of chronic disease rather than treating this as a one-off list,” Dr Willer said.

The numbers

- Medicare currently caps allied health chronic disease management at 5 sessions a year, shared across all disciplines. Dietitians Australia wants a minimum of 12 dedicated dietitian sessions

- Only 6 per cent of Australians meet recommended fruit and vegetable intake

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