Participants at risk of losing the support that keeps them eating and drinking safely - Media release

People with disability who rely on dietitians to eat and drink safely are at risk of losing that support under the NDIS Amendment Bill passed by the Senate this week, Dietitians Australia has warned.

Dietitians Australia President Dr Fiona Willer said the changes put participant safety, choice and control at risk.

“For a lot of the people we work with, eating and drinking safely is not a lifestyle question. It is the difference between staying at home or ending up in hospital,” Dr Willer said.

“Difficulty with swallowing, tube feeding and severe food aversion take time, training and careful risk management to handle safely. When that support is reduced, the consequences are choking, malnutrition, dehydration and avoidable hospital admissions.”

“Adequate nutrition and hydration underpin everything else in a participant's plan. Someone

who is malnourished or dehydrated does not have the energy or the concentration to take part in the other therapies their plan funds."

Dysphagia, or difficulty swallowing, affects roughly 8 per cent of the population, and far more within vulnerable groups: 60 per cent of children with developmental disability, 50 per cent of stroke survivors and 84 per cent of people with dementia.

Dietitians Australia Chief Executive Officer Magriet Raxworthy said participants were already losing choice about who supports them.

“Members are telling us that dietetic hours were being cut from people’s plans before this Bill was even decided, and that some dietitians have closed or scaled back their disability practices,” Ms Raxworthy said.

“When a provider leaves, a participant does not simply move to another dietitian. In much of the country there is no other dietitian with the right skills to move to,” Ms Raxworthy said. “You cannot choose a provider who is not there.”

Ms Raxworthy said the underlying problem was that there was too little dietetic support in the scheme to begin with.

“Dietetic providers make up around 3 per cent of the therapy providers delivering NDIS supports, and around one in twenty participants receiving therapy support sees a dietitian,” Ms Raxworthy said. “Set that against how common swallowing and feeding difficulties are among people with disability, and it is clear the scheme is not funding the dietetic care participants need.”

Scheme data for the six months to December 2025 shows the average participant who saw a dietitian received under five hours of dietetic support across the half year. Other therapies averaged between nine and eleven hours over the same period.

“Under five hours in six months is an assessment, a plan and very little else,” Ms Raxworthy said. “It is not enough to support a family how to feed someone safely, or to come back and

monitor a person's progress.

"Dietitians are not leaving because the work is not needed. They are leaving because the scheme does not fund enough dietetic support to sustain a safe practice. Every dietitian who leaves takes away a participant's option to be supported safely."

Dietetic prices under the scheme have been reduced in each of the last two years, following a period of six years of price freezes.

The NDIS Supports Rules, which will determine what is funded in practice, are still to be drafted. Dietitians Australia will keep pressing for those rules to protect the feeding, nutrition and hydration support a person with disability requires to live with dignity.

"The Senate vote is not the end of this," Ms Raxworthy said. "The rules that decide whether a person with disability can get help to eat and drink safely are still to be written, and we will be at the table for every one of those decisions."

About Dietitians Australia

Dietitians Australia is the peak body for the dietetics profession in Australia, representing more than 8,000 members. Accredited Practising Dietitian is the only recognised credential for dietitians and nutritionists in Australia.

For media enquiries: please contact Chris Morrison, Executive Director, Government and Public Affairs on 0434 496 069.