Children who are not growing need a dietitian in Thriving kids, NSW inquiry told

Children who are not growing need a path to a dietitian in Thriving Kids, the NSW Government's new program for children aged 8 and under with developmental delay or autism, Dietitians Australia has told a NSW parliamentary inquiry.

Chief Executive Officer, Magriet Raxworthy, gave evidence on Monday 19 October 2026 to the Legislative Council Select Committee on Foundational and disability supports for children and young people, alongside Exercise and Sports Science Australia, Speech Pathology Australia, the Australian Association of Psychologists Inc and National Disability Services.

“Our members see the same children every week: the child who has stopped climbing the growth chart, the child who eats a handful of foods and gags at anything else, and the parents who have tried everything online and now feel that asking for help is an admission of failure,” Ms Raxworthy said.

Accredited Practising Dietitians help these children get the nutrition they need to grow, learn and take part in the therapies that help them. They recognise ARFID, an eating disorder often mistaken for fussy eating, pick up growth faltering before it becomes a hospital admission, manage feeding tubes and supplements, and work alongside speech pathologists and occupational therapists in feeding teams.

“Nutrition looks simple because we all eat, so everyone assumes someone else is looking after it. A child who is not getting enough does not grow, and gains less from every hour of therapy

the family waited months for. Most children in Thriving Kids will never need us. The ones who do should not have to go searching for us," Ms Raxworthy said.

Thriving Kids' published documents do not yet mention nutrition, feeding therapy or dietitians, and families and providers are asking how dietetics will be included. The service specifications and intake criteria are being finalised now, ahead of allied health therapies starting in January 2027, so there is still time to include it.

At the inquiry, Dietitians Australia asked the committee to recommend that New South Wales:

- name nutrition, feeding therapy and dietetics in the Thriving Kids service specifications and intake criteria, so that a child whose growth, eating or feeding needs are identified has a funded pathway to an Accredited Practising Dietitian;
- open the private allied health panel and direct contracts to dietitians, including sole practitioners, priced to cover assessment, liaison and travel, so that children can keep seeing the practitioner who knows them, particularly outside the cities; and
- publish the specifications and intake criteria so that families and providers can see what is funded.

"Many of the dietitians who know these children work in small practices, and outside the cities there are very few others. Under the first round of contracts they can help only until a larger organisation builds its own team. We are asking the NSW Government to make sure private allied health practices, including sole practitioners, can take part in Thriving Kids directly, so that children keep seeing the dietitian who knows them. It needs no new program," Ms Raxworthy said.

Dietitians Australia has offered to work with the Department of Communities and Justice on the screening questions and referral triggers that would pick up feeding and growth concerns at intake.

ENDS

For media enquiries:?please contact Executive Director, Government and Public Affairs, Chris Morrison on 0486 163 016.?