

Thursday 28 October 2021

Dietitians essential in mental health care

It's time for Accredited Practising Dietitians to be recognised as [a key profession in the management of mental health](#), says Dietitians Australia.

As the nation wraps up Mental Health Awareness Month, ensuring our country has a comprehensive and effective workforce that can adequately support Australia's rising rates of mental illness is a must.

"Nutrition support, as part of a person's mental health care plan, has been found to be most effective when it is delivered by a dietitian¹," said Robert Hunt, CEO of Dietitians Australia.

"Australians nationwide must have timely access to skilled mental health professionals and we urge the government to acknowledge the need for dietetic services, particularly in prevention and early intervention of mental illness."

"Whether it's challenging eating practices for a person living with an eating disorder, supporting someone to manage the side-effects of their medication, helping a client to access nutritious foods or using medical nutrition therapy to help prevent and manage a mental illness – these are just some of the ways dietitians can make a difference."

But to see a real health change, the government needs to make it easier for Australians to see their dietitian via Medicare referral pathways and community-based government funded initiatives.

"With the government's draft National Mental Health Workforce strategy due to be finalised later this year, forgetting to focus on how to support Australians through food-based strategies, would be detrimental to our population's health," said Robert.

Investing in dietitians means savings across the healthcare system.

"With almost half of all Australians expected to experience a mental illness in their lifetime², support from a dietitian is likely to result in reduced burden on the healthcare system and better quality of life for our population," said Robert.

"Research shows that with support from a dietitian, people diagnosed with clinical depression were able to significantly reduce their mental health symptoms by making changes to their diet³."

"These dietary changes are also likely to help reduce the risk of lifestyle related health conditions like heart disease and type 2 diabetes, as well as improve gut health."

"We know that physical and mental health are intertwined, and we must have a workforce strategy that addresses overall health, rather than singling out these areas in isolation," said Robert.

ENDS

For media enquiries and interviews, contact Pattie King, Dietitians Australia 0409 661 920.

If you think you may be experiencing a mental health illness, please reach out to your local healthcare team for support.

For those based in Australia, 24-hour mental health support is available through [Lifeline](#) on 13 11 14 or [Beyond Blue](#) on 1300 224 636.

If you are seeking nutrition support, connect with an Accredited Practising Dietitian (APD) via our 'Find a Dietitian' search tool: <https://member.dietitiansaustralia.org.au/faapd>

¹Teasdale SB, Ward PB, Rosenbaum S, Samaras K, Stubbs B. Solving a weighty problem: Systematic review and meta-analysis of nutrition interventions in severe mental illness. *British Journal of Psychiatry*. Cambridge University Press; 2017;210(2):110–8. <https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.bp.115.177139>

²Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. Mental health [Internet]. Canberra: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2020 [cited 2021 Oct. 28]. Available from: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/australias-health/mental-health>

³Jacka FN, O'Neil A, Opie R. et al. A randomised controlled trial of dietary improvement for adults with major depression (the 'SMILES' trial). *BMC Medicine*; 2017;15 (23):1-13 <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12916-017-0791-y>