

Conflict of Interest Management Policy

POLICY STATEMENT

Managing conflict of interest is part of managing risk and is thus integral to good governance of Dietitians Australia. If a conflict of interest is not appropriately recognised and managed it can bias decisions and recommendations. If this becomes public knowledge, it will discredit the work done and cause reputational damage.

People are selected for involvement in formulating policy and professional approaches to their profession because they have expertise and interest in the process or outcome. A conflict of interest can occur when there is a risk or a perceived risk, that their professional judgement on the primary activity (for Dietitians Australia) may be unduly influenced by their secondary interest, which can include: their current professional role, current research, position in an organisation paid or voluntary, financial gain or an association or relationship they have with people or organisations of persuasion that could influence their judgment.

All relevant interests should be declared, acknowledged and managed. However, this does not necessarily preclude involvement in a particular Dietitians Australia activity.

SCOPE

This policy applies to any person/s:

- holding a position as Director on the Dietitians Australia Board
- on a committee of the Dietitians Australia Board
- on the leadership team of an Interest Group (IG), Discussion Group (DG) or Engagement and Development Committee (EDC)
- representing Dietitians Australia on an external committee
- presenting papers at Dietitians Australia conferences, Continuing Professional Development events or Centre for Advanced Learning Courses
- employed by Dietitians Australia as a staff member or contractor

The management of conflict of interest for the wider membership in their daily practice is addressed in the Dietitians Australia Code of Professional Conduct.

The management of conflict of interest in relation to Dietitians Australia corporate partnerships or sponsorship of Dietitians Australia activities is addressed in the Dietitians Australia Corporate Partnerships and Sponsorship Policy.

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DEFINITIONS

For the application of this policy the following broad definitions have been applied.

Term	Definition
Interest	Being employed by or acting as a consultant to an entity, being a director on a board, being a member of an entity, receiving funding for research or other support for activities, or receiving payment for services.
Conflict of interest	<p>a) A person in a position of trust is required to exercise judgment or make representation on behalf of others and who also has interests or involvements that could weaken a decision process or could interfere with their ability to be fair or impartial in negotiations.</p> <p>b) A person gains personal benefit from the decisions or actions that they may take on behalf of the organisation they represent at the time of decision making.</p> <p>c) A situation where loyalties and obligations may be compromised because of self-interest or other imperatives.</p>
Actual conflict of interest	Exists when acting on behalf of the group or organisation the outcome or advantage will go directly to the person or an external party.
Potential conflict of interest	Means circumstances may arise where a conflict of interest may occur.
Perceived conflict of interest	Occurs where a person's employment, beliefs or affiliations may be seen by others to compromise independent judgement.
Recuse	To declare yourself to be, or to render somebody, disqualified to judge something or participate in something because of possible bias or personal interest.
Group	Dietitians Australia Board, Interest Group leadership team, Discussion Group leadership team, Engagement and Development Committee, working group, or committee.
Dietitians Australia activity	Including but not limited to professional development event or resource, or networking event, advocacy submission or spokesperson statement.

Despite there being no evidence of improper actions, a conflict of interest can create an appearance of impropriety that can undermine confidence in the ability of that person to act properly and in the best interest of the organisation.

When a conflict of interest exists or is perceived to exist it must be managed. There are several ways of managing conflict of interest and they depend on the degree of risk, real and perceived.

Diversity and differences of opinion do not constitute a conflict of interest when based on scientific or other evidence.

POLICY GUIDELINES

Reporting and documentation

1. It is the responsibility of all members and staff to declare any relevant interest to the appropriate person, in a timely manner. Not all interests are relevant especially those of a social or recreational nature except for board members where any other directorship or executive role must be identified. These must be recorded in writing.
2. If a member's situation changes throughout the activity, they should declare any changes to conflict of interest.
3. All Directors of Dietitians Australia will sign a 'Consent to Act as a Director' form on appointment to the Board. The Chief Executive Officer will check these declarations to identify potential conflicts and maintain files.
4. All Board, Council, Committee, IG and EDC and DG agendas will contain a standing item 'Declaration of Interest'. It is the responsibility of the Chairperson or convenor to manage any identified conflict.
5. It is the responsibility of all participants to identify any actual or potential conflicts regarding agenda items and declare them at the commencement of the meeting. Declarations must be recorded in writing by email, using the Dietitians Australia member communications platform and/or minuted at any relevant meeting. The record must describe what the conflicts were and the strategy used to manage each of them.
6. All members applying to represent Dietitians Australia on external bodies or act as spokespersons will sign a Declaration of Interest Form (see Appendix A) as part of the selection process. They must also declare any new interest or conflict arising during the course of their representation (see Representation: Roles and Responsibility policy and Spokespersons policy).
7. All Dietitians Australia contracts, including employment contracts, will contain clauses covering conflict of interest. The Chief Executive Officer is responsible for managing this sector.
8. All requests for Endorsement of materials by Dietitians Australia will contain a Declaration of Interest (see Endorsement Policy).
9. Any formal external relationship in which Dietitians Australia engages (partnership, sponsorship, alliance, joint project) will be clearly and openly declared.
10. All presenters at Dietitians Australia conferences, presenters at Dietitians Australia events and CAL courses, and members of Dietitians Australia committees, working groups, Interest Group leadership teams, Discussion Group leadership teams, Engagement and Development Committees and the Board must complete a Declaration of Interest form (Appendix A) on their appointment and each time a change in interests occurs.
11. Including a statement about management of conflicts of interest in the final output of the activity (examples in Appendix B).

Chairing

12. The role of the Chairperson is critical in giving guidance and direction and should be free of all possible conflicts of interest. The Chair does not need to be an expert on the group's core business but should be able to have a general understand of the content.
13. Should the Chairperson (including the President) identify a conflict of interest they must relinquish the role of chair to another member of the committee for the discussion of that item and not participate in drafting or approving recommendations.

Participation

14. If an actual conflict is identified the member will not vote on any decision regarding that agenda item and may be asked or choose to refrain from discussing the item or remove themselves from the meeting.
15. If an actual or potential conflict of interest is identified by others it should be reported to the appropriate committee Chairperson or Dietitians Australia staff member. If the issue cannot be managed, the person in question may be asked to step down from their role.
16. Groups should aim for the majority of members to be free from a conflict of interest, perceived or real.
17. Persons presenting at Dietitians Australia Conferences or CPD events must declare any material support (grants, scholarships, assistance with travel) from external parties and commercial interests (other than one's immediate employer/s) that may represent actual or potential conflicts of interest with regard to their presentation. This will be identified in the abstracts and conference program.
18. Should a person be unwilling to resolve an issue of conflict of interest the Board will make the final decision as to the continuation of that person's appointment.
19. Failure to disclose major conflict of interest may result in the conflicted member being removed from the group and the activity output to be re-evaluated, depending on stage of development.

EXAMPLE SCENARIOS FOR MANAGING CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Scenario 1 – Representing Dietitians Australia

A Dietitians Australia member is providing comment to the media on behalf of the organisation. They are employed by the food industry or work as a brand ambassador. This person must declare an **interest**. There may be a **potential conflict of interest**. Should they be asked to speak on an issue regarding a particular food group related to their place of work, they may find it difficult to separate the interests of Dietitians Australia and their workplace expectations.

Management: If there is another member who is equally qualified but does not have the same potential for conflict of interest then they would be the first choice to provide comment. If the

member has a perceived or real conflict of interest, then they cannot provide comment on behalf of Dietitians Australia. If a suitable, alternate spokesperson cannot be arranged, consideration may be undertaken for the member to provide comment as an individual Accredited Practising Dietitian (not under a spokesperson capacity), depending on risk versus benefit of undertaking the opportunity.

Scenario 2 – Serving on internal committees

A member of a Dietitians Australia committee or working party is employed by, contracts to or whose research is supported by a company, NGO, university or government department who might also have an interest in issues that committee may be working on from time to time. The external organisation may or may not act on their interest in the issue (for example, preparing a submission in response to public consultation) and any action may be unknown to the Dietitians Australia member. The external organisation's views on the issue/s may be consistent or inconsistent with Dietitians Australia views.

- a) The member is aware of, but not involved in the external organisation's submission.

Management: The **potential conflict of interest** must be declared and recorded in writing in meeting minutes, by email, or via a Dietitians Australia member communications platform. Where feasible, the work should be shared with a 'buddy', being a member with expertise in the issue and without a conflict of interest.

- b) The member becomes aware of the external organisation's submission after participating in Dietitians Australia committee discussions, but is not involved in the external organisation's submission.

Management: The **potential conflict of interest** must be declared and recorded in writing in meeting minutes, by email, or via a Dietitians Australia member communications platform. Where feasible, the work should be shared with a 'buddy', being a member with expertise in the issue and without a conflict of interest.

- c) The member is involved in the external organisation's submission, which has a view consistent with Dietitians Australia's view.

Management: The **actual conflict of interest** must be declared and recorded in writing in meeting minutes, by email, or via a Dietitians Australia member communications platform. Where feasible, the work should be shared with a 'buddy', being a member with expertise in the issue and without a conflict of interest.

- d) The member is involved in the external organisation's submission, which has a view inconsistent with Dietitians Australia's view.

The **actual conflict of interest** must be declared and recorded in writing in meeting minutes, by email, or via a Dietitians Australia member communications platform. The member should recuse themselves from discussions about the submission and not be involved in any decision making on Dietitians Australia's standpoint.

Scenario 3 – Personal financial gain

A member working on a committee to organise a large CPD event is offered free personal accommodation at the venue. If the offer is accepted this is an **actual conflict of interest**.

Management: The member must declare the offer to the committee and the EDC or Dietitians Australia Staff. Since the offer may be to the potential benefit of DA, the conference organising committee may decide to utilise the offer to offset costs by accommodating speakers or used as a prize for delegates. However, the Committee Chairperson must assure themselves there is no quid pro quo conflict of interest and the decision must be minuted and declared.

Scenario 4 – Commercial interests

A member or other professional is invited to give a presentation at a CPD event or conference being organised by Dietitians Australia or one of its committees or IGs. The speaker has commercial interests from which they are currently making financial gain or may make financial gain in the future. These commercial interests are related to the topic on which they will be presenting at the event/seminar/conference. This is a **potential conflict of interest**.

Management: Organiser/s of CPD events and conferences held under the auspices of Dietitians Australia will request speakers to declare any commercial interests that represent actual or potential conflicts with their presentation, prior to the event. Speakers (whether a Dietitians Australia member or not) should provide details of the commercial interests to the event organiser/s upon request. Organisers should ensure that these are identified in the abstracts and conference program; and if there is no formal written program it must be verbally declared at the commencement of the presentation.

Appendix A – DECLARATION OF INTEREST FORM

First Name: **Last Name:**

Name of business (if applicable):

Please list the names of organisations or activities you are associated with both paid and voluntary:

Employment / Consultant Fees	
Honoraria/Fees for Service	
Advisory/Steering Committee Appointments	
Investigator-Initiated Research Grants	
Travel/conference assistance	
Other	

I agree to:

- inform Dietitians Australia immediately should there be any change to my circumstances in this area
- adhere to the Dietitians Australia Conflict of Interest Management Policy

Signature: **Date:**

Dietitians Australia Activity or group memberships	Date

Appendix B – EXAMPLE DECLARATION OF INTEREST STATEMENTS

Example 1 – Advocacy submission

This submission was prepared by the Dietitians Australia Food Regulatory and Policy Committee following the Conflict of Interest Management Policy and process approved by the Board of Dietitians Australia. This policy can be viewed on the [Dietitians Australia website](#). The committee's membership is comprised of Dietitians Australia members with wide ranging expertise in areas including public health, food systems, food industry and academia.

Example 2 – Professional development webinar

Dr Apple's research is funded by OrgX. OrgX was not involved in the development of this webinar. This webinar does not represent the views of OrgX.