

1 April 2021

Senator the Hon Greg Hunt
Minister for Health and Aged Care
PO Box 6022
House of Representatives
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

By email: Greg.Hunt.MP@aph.gov.au

Dear Minister Hunt

On behalf of the Dietitians Australia, I wish to express my concerns regarding the continued elevated rates of **'unintentional weight loss'** experienced by elderly Australians in residential aged care homes. The **National Aged Care Mandatory Quality Indicator Program** shows a grim picture, as the quick reference table shows below:

Weight loss- number of care recipients	Oct – Dec 2019	Jan – March 2020	April – June 2020	July – Sept 2020	Oct – Dec 2020
Significant unplanned weight loss	14,733	16,463	13,161	13,836	14,985
Consecutive unplanned weight loss	15,398	14,580	12,738	13,338	15,274

It is alarming to see that in the October-December 2020 quarter, 14,985 aged care residents recorded significant unplanned weight loss (i.e. three or more kilograms) and 15,274 residents recorded consecutive unplanned weight loss (i.e. a loss of any amount every month over three consecutive months) compared to the previous period. The accelerated rate of almost **1,150 more residents recording significant unplanned weight loss** in the last quarter compared to the previous period is unacceptable and cause for serious alarm and prompt action.

Accredited Practising Dietitians (APDs) are an essential part of the solution to reverse the escalating rates of unintended weight loss and malnutrition in residential aged care. Yet the current aged care system means that APD services are sadly an afterthought, typically called upon by aged care providers when significant amounts of weight have been lost and malnutrition is well established. The current lack of provision of adequate food and fluids and access to APD services represents **elder abuse by neglect or omission**.

In light of the appalling unintentional weight loss statistics, Dietitians Australia is calling on the Australian Government to:

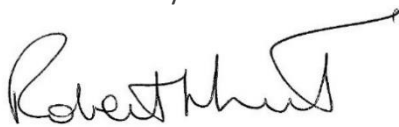
- Replace the National Aged Care Mandatory Quality Indicator for 'unplanned weight loss' with 'malnutrition' in residential aged care, as malnutrition risk and malnutrition prevalence is not captured in this current quality indicator. Malnutrition screening must become embedded in

the admission process for aged care services and results of quarterly re-screens of nutritional status must become the mandatory nutrition criteria and replace mandatory reporting on unintentional weight loss. *This aligns with 'Recommendation 22' in the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety final report.*

- Mandate that approved providers of residential aged care employ (or retain) at least one dietitian (*as per 'Recommendation 38' in the Royal Commission final report*). Mandatory malnutrition screening with nutrition management by Accredited Practising Dietitians using a food-first approach will improve the quality of life for aged care consumers and could provide more than \$80 million in savings.
- Immediately increase the Basic Daily Fee by \$10/resident/day, conditional on providers reporting on expenditure to meet resident's nutritional needs. *This aligns with 'Recommendation 112' in the Royal Commission final report.*
- Develop and implement a 'Nutrition Care Policy' in all residential aged care homes that includes an onsite Accredited Practising Dietitian (as outlined above) supported by a multidisciplinary governance structure encompassing:
 - auditing of food and nutrition systems
 - malnutrition screening
 - nutrition assessment
 - nutrition care planning
 - menu planning
 - meal reviews and mealtime environment reviews
 - assistance with eating and drinking
 - staff nutrition education and ongoing training

I welcome a meeting to discuss this vital issue and outline the proposed solutions in greater detail. I can be contacted on (02) 6189 1201.

Yours sincerely



Robert Hunt
Chief Executive Officer