

Food Systems and Environmental Sustainability Role Statement

Developed by members of the Food and Environment Interest Group

Introduction

Accredited Practising Dietitians (APDs) are recognised professionals with the qualifications and skills to provide expert nutrition and dietary advice. APDs are qualified to advise individuals and groups on nutrition-related matters.

APDs have university training accredited by Dietitians Australia, undertake ongoing professional development and commit to evidence-based practice. They comply with the [Dietitians Australia Code of Conduct for Dietitians & Nutritionists](#) and commit to providing quality service.

APD is the only national credential recognised by the Australian Government, Medicare, the Department of Veterans Affairs, the National Disability Insurance Agency and most private health funds as the quality standard for nutrition and dietetics services in Australia. It is a recognised trademark protected by law.

Purpose of this role statement

The purpose of this Role Statement is:

- To define the role an APD may fulfil when working in the area of food systems and environmental sustainability
- To promote the knowledge and expertise of an APD, broadly and in the area of food systems and environmental sustainability and beyond [National Competency Standards](#)
- To advocate for dietetic services

Knowledge and skills in this area of practice

Entry level dietetic competencies ensure all APDs can conduct assessments, diagnose nutritional issues, and develop, monitor and evaluate interventions. Within a particular practice area, APD skills and knowledge will range from entry level to highly skilled. Within this continuum APDs can either fully manage the patient, seek support to continue seeing the patient or refer the patient on.

The following is a list of skills and knowledge required to work in the food systems and environmental sustainability area:

Knowledge

- Understanding of practices within industrialised and local food systems
- Policy intervention opportunities and challenges to achieve food system reform at each of the food system phases; agricultural production, processing, distribution, retail, consumption and food waste

- Behaviour change theory and its application to identify key motivators and drivers for encouraging healthy and sustainable dietary behaviour and food practices
- Limitations of our knowledge and seek expertise from agriculture, environmental science, engineering, food science and technology, consumer research, etc

Skills

- Collect, assess and interpret relevant information on food system resilience, planetary health and environmental sustainability and translate it into effective interventions/practice
- Source highly credible evidence, identify suitable policies or practice intervention, identify key stakeholders, frame an advocacy 'ask' and create a win-win scenario to advocate for change
- Engage key stakeholders across a range of sectors and establish and maintain collaborative partnerships for action on identified food systems and environmental sustainability issues
- Tailor written information for various purposes including reports, funding acquisition, advocacy and media engagement
- Adapt communication styles to a range of audiences, including professional and community stakeholders from a diverse range of disciplines spanning agriculture, food industry, retail sectors as well as funding bodies

Activities entry level APDs would conduct:

- Promote healthy and sustainable food practices (see Appendix 1)
- Facilitate skill development and training to build food system resilience and environmental sustainability capacity across sectors e.g. agriculture, food industry, retail sectors
- Engage key stakeholders in collaborative action on food system and sustainability issues
- Advocate for policy interventions/procedural changes within contained contexts
- Monitor the impact of diet-related food system and environmental sustainability initiatives, analyse results and report on findings
- Support implementation of diet-related food system and environmental sustainability initiatives

Activities APDs working at a higher level would conduct:

- Provide leadership and supervision to staff and students undertaking food system and environmental sustainability activities, including research and evaluation
- Develop food system and environmental sustainability service specifications, policies, standards and guidelines and/or review existing documentation
- Implement capacity building initiatives and manage advocacy campaigns
- Lead collaborative practice and manage inter-sectoral partnerships with high-level stakeholders
- Assess the impact of public policy on food system and environmental sustainability outcomes

Practitioners should refer to the [Scope of Practice Decision Tool](#) to determine if a task is within their scope of practice.

Appendix – Background

“Climate change is the greatest threat to human health of the 21st century.”¹ There is no denying that our current healthcare system and food systems are catalysing climate change, and therefore impacting our health negatively. Our diet and our food systems have great potential to promote sustainability, as demonstrated in the recent Decadal Plan for the Science of Nutrition which outlined the interactions between nutrition and majority of the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).² As demonstrated by our colleagues in the United States, Dietitians have a critical role to play in promoting environmental sustainability, food system reform and the mitigation of climate change, regardless of which context they’re working in and where their core practice sits on the dietetic continuum.^{3,4}

Climate change affects human health, placing increased demand on healthcare services. As advocated by the Climate and Health Alliance, climate change threatens the health and wellbeing of the population.⁵ By 2030, a total of 6 million deaths per year are predicted to be attributed to the carbon economy and climate change.⁵

Our current healthcare system is catalysing climate change

The health industry is one of the most serious contributors to emissions and environmental degradation.⁶ The health sector is one of the biggest energy and water consumers and producers of waste. In Australia, the health sector contributes >7% of the nation’s carbon footprint, with hospitals making up 44% of those emissions.⁷

Our current food system is catalysing climate change

Our food system collectively contributes up to 30% of the world’s greenhouse gas emissions, requires 70% of available freshwater, utilises approximately 40% of all ice-free land, is the largest cause of deforestation.⁸

The role of Accredited Practising Dietitians in minimising the environmental impacts of food systems and healthcare

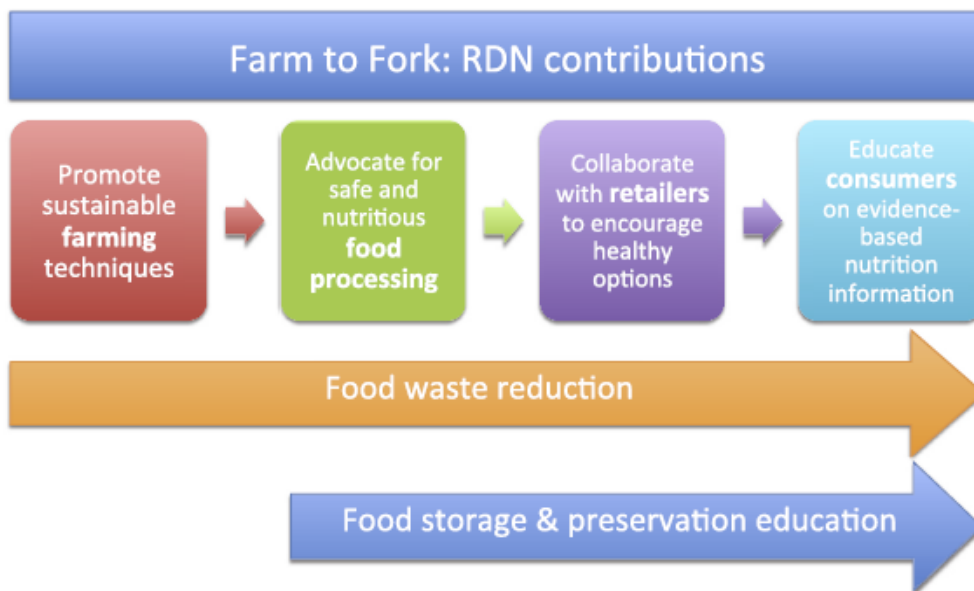
Accredited Practising Dietitians (APDs) are recognised professionals with the qualifications and skills to provide expert nutrition and dietary advice. Figure 1 illustrates four action areas where dietitians can interact with the food system more broadly, to bring about change.⁹

Issues of environmental sustainability “apply to all aspects of nutrition and dietetics practice, can be practiced at both the program and systems level, and are broader than any one specific practice setting or individual intervention.”⁴

Figure 1: Registered dietitian nutritionist priority action areas in the intersection of agriculture, nutrition & health⁷



Figure 2: From farm to fork: registered dietitian nutritionist (RDN) contributions.⁹



In terms of influencing consumers to follow evidence-based nutrition information, there are some clearly defined healthy and environmentally sustainable food-related practices.^{10, 11,12,13,14, 15}

- Avoid over-consumption beyond caloric requirements
- Limit intake of highly processed, nutrient poor and over-packaged foods
- Consume no more than the recommended amounts of animal-derived foods, produced sustainably and ethically
- Increase intake of plant-based foods
- Eat seasonally
- Eat more locally produced foods and minimise imported foods when local options are available
- Adopt food waste minimisation strategies
- Connect with the local food system
- Support sustainable food production practices

It is helpful to consider the actual work tasks that a dietitian may be involved in across this diverse range of practice areas and settings. In the United States, the Academy of Dietetics' *'Hunger and Environmental Nutrition Dietetic Practice Group'* developed the Standards of Professional Performance (SOPP) as a tool for dietitians working in sustainable, resilient and healthy food and water systems.⁴ Table 1 outlines some case examples of how dietitians can use the SOPP in various roles across different settings.

Table 1: Case Examples of work conducted by dietitians across the continuum of care (adapted from ‘Standards of Professional Performance (SOPP) for Registered Dietitian Nutritionists (RDNs) in Sustainable, Resilient and Healthy Food and Water Systems⁴⁾

Dietetics Role	Case Examples of SOPP
Clinical Dietitian	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All units to adopt environmentally friendly practices as part of their annual goals and objectives • Addition of sustainability information to patient education materials and patient menus
Food Service Dietitian/Manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incorporation of food & water systems principles into procedures • Determining training needs to build environmental sustainability capacity amongst staff to ensure sustainable practices are adopted • Local food procurement policy development, implementation, monitoring • Implementation of food waste minimisation strategies
Private Practice Dietitian	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promotion of healthy and sustainable diet-related practices within advice for clients – both verbal and written education • Incorporation of sustainability practices into business operations
Food Industry Dietitian	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Model best practices in environmental sustainability e.g. Ethical food procurement policies, food waste and disposal • Creation of programs and consumer educational materials to elevate the employers’ credibility concerning environmental sustainability • Incorporation of ethical food systems and environmental sustainability principles into criteria guiding vendor partnerships • Education of staff and consumers
Public Health Dietitian	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advocacy and program development, implementation and evaluation to promote equitable access to healthy and sustainable diets • Collaboration with key stakeholders to address determinants of food-related climate change outcomes and population health
Researcher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Source funding and collaborate with other researchers both within dietetics and external to dietetics, to advance the evidence for sustainable food systems and environmental sustainability in dietetic practice
Educator of Dietetics Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incorporate environmental sustainability and food systems education into the curriculum across all areas of dietetic practice
Dietetic Program Director	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen the ability of dietitians to promote and implement environmentally sustainable practices

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