

# Priorities for Victoria Election 2022

## Mental Health

1. **Every Local and Area Mental Health and Wellbeing Service across Victoria be funded to include Accredited Practising Dietitian (APD) services.**

This request is supported by Exercise and Sports Science Australia.

In March 2021, the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System released its [report](#) with 65 recommendations. The Andrews Government agreed to commit to implementing all interim and all final recommendations. Recommendations relevant to the dietetic profession include recommendation 3, 5, 57 and 58<sup>1</sup>.

### Evidence for Dietetic Intervention:

There is significant evidence for dietary interventions treating depression and anxiety along with the management of eating disorders, severe mental illness and substance use disorders.

Mental illnesses often co-occur with chronic physical illnesses like heart disease, respiratory disease and some cancers. The relationship between mental and physical health is bi-directional (each can cause the other). Psychotropic medications, commonly prescribed for the treatment of mental illnesses, can also cause significant weight gain and chronic physical illnesses like heart disease and diabetes.

- A Deakin University Food and Mood Centre study found:
  - a 32% remission rate of depression symptoms over a 12-week diet intervention trial delivered by an Accredited Practising Dietitian.
  - average total health sector costs were \$856 lower and average societal costs were \$2,591 lower for those receiving dietary support compared to social support.
- AMMEND randomised controlled trial, compared the effect of a Mediterranean diet to befriending support on the symptoms of depression in young males (18-25years), found that:
  - at 12 weeks the diet intervention group had significantly improved depression scores compared to the social support group.
  - All participants in the diet intervention group had improved their depression scores by the end of the study with 36% of scores representing low to minimal depression.

Given the limitations of pharmacotherapy and psychotherapy, and the high level of co-occurrence of mental illness with chronic physical illnesses, there is a need for new approaches for managing mental illness.

### Cost to the health system and funding:

The annual cost of mental illness in Australia has been estimated at \$70 billion, including the cost of treatment, lost productivity and lost participation in the labour force. The [Commonwealth-Victoria Bilateral Agreement](#) for Mental Health and Suicide Prevention will provide \$815M over the next 5 years.

## Public Health and Health Policy

- 2. Commit to implementing and funding actions from both the National Preventative Health Strategy (2021) and National Obesity Strategy (2022), including commit to investing 5% of the health budget in preventative health.**

These ten-year strategies require coordinated effort by State, Federal and Local Governments. The current Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing plan 2019-2023 underpins these strategies and calls for increasing healthy eating and improving mental wellbeing.

27,500 Australians die a preventable death each year from an unhealthy diet. In 2017-2018, around 90% of Australians weren't eating enough vegetables and more than 35% of energy intake was from unhealthy foods and drinks high in added sugar, saturated fat, salt or alcohol.

If it was easier for Victorians to enjoy healthy foods and drinks consistent with the Australian Dietary Guidelines the Australian disease burden would be reduced by 62% for coronary heart disease, 34-38% for stroke, 41% for type 2 diabetes, 37% for mouth, pharyngeal and laryngeal cancer, 22-29% for bowel cancer, 20% for oesophageal cancer, 12% for prostate cancer, 8% for lung cancer and 2% for stomach cancer.

## Public Hospitals

- 3. Increase the dietetic workforce in public hospitals, community health, justice, disability, maternal, newborn and child health services, and aged care services.**

This will enable dietitians to provide timely, effective, safe, and individualised care in line with evidence-based practice, leading to better nutrition outcomes for the Victorian population and reduced costs and burden to the health system.

A New Zealand study found that for every \$1 spent on dietetic intervention, it saved the health system \$5<sup>2</sup>.

## What we do

Dietitians Australia is the national association of the dietetic profession with over **8,000 members across Australia**, and branches in each state and territory. In **Victoria** we have **2022** Dietitians Australia members.

Dietitians Australia is the leading voice in nutrition and dietetics and advocates for food and nutrition for healthier people and healthier communities. Dietitians Australia also administers the Accredited Practising Dietitian (APD) program, which provides an assurance of safety and quality and is the foundation of self-regulation of the dietetic profession in Australia.

<sup>1</sup> Recommendation 3: establishment of new mental health and wellbeing services for all ages and illnesses (50-60 new Adult and Older Adult Local Mental Health and Wellbeing Services (MHWS); 22 Adult Area and Older Adult MHWS; 13 Infant, Child and Youth Area MHWS; Statewide services)  
Recommendation 5: Core functions - 1 a) Local and Area MHWS to provide integrated treatment, care and support comprising a broad range of treatments and therapies; and 2. Local and Area MHWS work in collaboration to deliver multidisciplinary holistic and integrated treatment in a variety of delivery modes including telehealth. Volume 1 of the final report explores therapies and treatments in more detail, stating that they will encompass allied health (among others), and integrated treatment for co-occurring physical illnesses.  
Recommendation 57: Workforce Strategy - 1. Ensure that the range of expanded mental health and wellbeing services is delivered by a diverse, multidisciplinary mental health workforce.  
Recommendations 58 (workforce capabilities), 63 (facilitating translational research) and 64 (driving innovation) may also be relevant.

<sup>2</sup> An Australian Council of Deans study is currently underway to confirm the Australian figure, but it is expected to be similar to New Zealand.