

Inquiry into food security in Australia

Response to terms of reference

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Recipient

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About Dietitians Australia

Dietitians Australia is the national association of the dietetic profession with over 8500 members, and branches in each state and territory. Dietitians Australia is the leading voice in nutrition and dietetics and advocates for food and nutrition for healthier people and healthier communities.

The Accredited Practising Dietitian (APD) program provides an assurance of safety and quality and is the foundation of self-regulation of the dietetic profession in Australia. Accredited Practising Dietitians play a key role in facilitating food system transformation. Dietetic practice promotes healthy and sustainable diets at various levels, for example in food-based dietary guidelines at the population-level, food procurement and menu planning policies at an institutional-level and in nutrition education to client groups, community groups and other health professionals, and medical nutrition therapy at the group and individual level.

It is the position of Dietitians Australia that to promote human and planetary health, a food system transformation is needed that supports the population to adopt healthy and sustainable diet-related practices.¹ A healthy and sustainable diet must:

- Be nutritionally adequate, healthy and safe
- Have low environmental impact and be protective of natural resources and biodiversity
- Be culturally acceptable
- Be accessible, economically fair and affordable

Dietitians Australia acknowledges that it is critical to prioritise Indigenous knowledges in consultation, policymaking and implementation processes to achieve these recommendations.

This submission was prepared by Dietitians Australia staff following the [Conflict of Interest Management Policy](#) and process approved by the Board of Dietitians Australia.

Recommendations

Dietitians Australia welcomes the opportunity to provide input into this Terms of Reference. We acknowledge this inquiry is focused on agricultural systems, however, the food system as a whole impacts on the economy, climate, society and health. A holistic review is therefore recommended to ensure the best outcome for all Australians.

Dietitians Australia:

1. Broadly supports the Terms of Reference and strongly advocates for a healthy and sustainable food system as an overarching theme to be addressed across the listed Terms of Reference
2. Calls for a National Nutrition Policy and implementation plan which prioritises public health across all food systems and food security for all Australians²
3. Calls for a regular, comprehensive and representative national food security survey³
4. Broadly supports the findings and recommendations from the New South Wales Committee on Environment and Planning, Food production and supply in NSW Report,⁴ and recommends the inclusion of this report as a background document for the Inquiry

5. Advocates for the inclusion of the National Obesity Strategy 2022-2032,⁵ and National Preventive Health Strategy 2021-2030⁶ as background documents for the Inquiry. These documents provide data on the current health crisis and burden related to the consumption of unhealthy food in Australia, and provides solutions to circumvent future loss of life, disability, increasing health care costs and economic losses.

Rationale

National Nutrition Policy and implementation plan

Since 1992, there has been no new National Nutrition Policy in Australia. There is increasing evidence that unhealthy eating is driven by food systems that create unhealthy food environments, encourage unhealthy eating and undermine effective translation of evidence-based dietary guidelines into policy and practice.⁷⁻¹¹ A coordinated 'whole-of government' approach is required to support national, state and local governments to work together with non-government organisations and civil society to tackle unhealthy food environments, reduce the incidence, prevalence and cost of diet-related health problems and promote health and wellbeing.¹² A new National Nutrition Policy would look to provide food and nutrition security for all Australians with a commitment to equitable action.² This policy would involve departments beyond health and consider the role of sectors such as agriculture and trade.²

Lack of data

Data drives economies and government priorities, and without robust and ongoing information about the state of food security in Australia, no informed decision making is possible. In 2020, the *Understanding food insecurity in Australia* report noted that food security is not measured at a population level regularly or consistently.³ Estimates in this report suggest that 4% to 13% of the general population are food insecure.³ There are several population groups who may be more vulnerable to food insecurity. This includes people on low-incomes, people who are isolated either socially or geographically, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, culturally and linguistically diverse groups, single-parent households, older people and people experiencing homelessness.³ Reasons for food insecurity vary and can include material hardship, limited financial resources, difficulty accessing affordable healthy foods or limited health and nutrition literacy.³ There is a critical need to implement a routine, robust food security monitoring and surveillance system in Australia.

Food systems and the impact on the economy, climate, society, and health

In Australia, the way our food is produced, manufactured, distributed and consumed is contributing to climate change and malnutrition in all its forms.^{1,13-14} The agricultural sector is responsible for 16% of Australia's greenhouse gas emissions as well as biodiversity loss, water consumption and unsustainable land management practices.¹⁵ This is worsened by the fact that unhealthy foods (high saturated fat, added sugar and salt) account for 27% of diet-related emissions.¹⁶⁻¹⁸ Unhealthy dietary patterns are the leading preventable risk factor for chronic disease, particularly amongst lower socio-economic groups.^{14,19}

The relationship between our food system and our climate is bidirectional. Climate change and poor environmental conditions also affect our food supply and security, for example through decreased crop yield, availability and quality, which adversely affects health.²⁰ This requires a change to both

food production and consumption practices to ensure current and future generations are nourished within planetary boundaries.²¹ Global targets are an effective mechanism for driving such change, such as Agenda 2030, the Paris Agreement²² and the United Nations' Decade of Action on Nutrition.²³ Efforts to improve our food system can have far-reaching benefits – improving food security and nutrition, social and gender equity, community resilience and more.²⁴

To achieve a more healthy, sustainable, and equitable food system, change will need to occur across all sub-systems, including more sustainable agricultural practices, less energy use in food processing and transportation, a changed food supply chain and retail sector, significant changes in consumer food choices, as well as strategies that result in less food waste. This will require comprehensive action across multiple settings to bring about the necessary change. Food environments, including where people access food, the types of foods available, and the way that foods are marketed, have an enormous impact on population diets.²¹

It is agreed that a whole-of-system approach is required, and efforts to promote healthy and sustainable diets can trigger action across the entire food system.²⁴⁻²⁵ The food system has six phases which make up 'the interconnected system of everything and everybody that influences, and is influenced by, the activities involved in bringing food from farm to fork and beyond':²⁶ (i) agricultural production, (ii) distribution, transport and trade, (iii) processing, (iv) food retail/service, (v) consumption, and (vi) waste and disposal. The points of intersection between diet and this broader food system present a great opportunity to achieve systemic transformation, in particular, efforts to promote the consumption of healthy and sustainable diets²⁶ and food security.

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