

Measuring What Matters

Response to consultation

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Recipient

Treasury

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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 have an important role in the health and wellbeing of all Australians.

This submission was prepared by Dietitians Australia staff in consultation with members, following the [Conflict of Interest Management Policy](#) and process approved by the Board of Dietitians Australia. Dietitians Australia members have wide ranging expertise in areas including public health, food systems, and academia.

Introduction

Dietitians Australia acknowledges the Albanese Government, as the first to implement a well-being approach to economic policy in Australia.

Dietitians Australia strongly support the development of a national framework of indicators. While there are many important, cross-cutting, and mutually beneficial indicators, the recommendations below focus on the impact of healthy and sustainable food systems to ensure the well-being of people and planet.

Recommendations

1. **Cultural relevance** - the concepts and indicators of well-being must be culturally relevant and responsive.¹ For example, cultural indicators specific to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people,² such as caring for and connection to Country;³ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of knowing, being and doing; language; family; kinship; community; lore; relationality and self-determination, are central to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' well-being.⁴
2. **Adapt and adopt** - given the importance of global harmonisation for comparisons, using The Organisation for Economic co-operation and Development (OECD) Framework for Measuring Well-being and Progress as a source of inspiration is supported. As well as the adoption of additional and existing indicators from countries with established well-being frameworks.
3. **Additional indicators** - food is a basic necessity of life. A nutritious diet is one of the most influential factors contributing to health and well-being and has a strong relationship to quality-of-life outcomes. The state of health impacts participation in a range of activities including education, employment, relationships, and society. The state of the food system impacts access to safe, nutritious, and affordable food, household spending, and the environment. The importance of food for sustainable development is well acknowledged by the Sustainable Development Goals, with several indicators across Goals 2 – Zero Hunger and 3 – Good Health and Well-Being.⁵

Dietitians Australia advocates for the addition of three indicators, (1) fruit and vegetable, consumption, (2) exclusive breastfeeding and (3) food security. All indicators meet the suggested criteria for indicators; relevant, complete, measurable, comparable, reliable and understandable (Appendix 1). Specific details of these indicators are outlined below.

Discussion

Indicator 1. Fruit and vegetable consumption

Percentage of adults and children who met both the fruit and vegetable dietary intake recommendation.

Rationale for inclusion:

- The Welsh Government included two separate national indicators for adults and children; Percentage of adults/children who have fewer than two healthy lifestyle behaviours (not smoking, healthy weight, eat five fruit or vegetables a day, not drinking above guidelines and meet the physical activity guidelines).⁶ Healthy lifestyle is also included as an indicator of the ACT Wellbeing Framework, the indicator will measure weight for adults and children as well as examining contributing factors such as healthy food consumption and appropriate physical activity.⁷
- The Australian Dietary Guidelines recommend two serves of fruit, and five serves of vegetables to help protect against chronic diseases including heart disease, stroke, and some types of cancers. They may also prevent excessive weight gain.⁸
- Five of the seven leading factors that have been identified as contributing to the health gap between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and non-Indigenous Australians are related to poor dietary intake: obesity, high blood cholesterol, alcohol consumption, high blood pressure, and low fruit and vegetable intake.⁹
- Improving access to and the consumption of a healthy diet is a priority focus of the National Preventive Health Strategy 2021-2030.¹⁰
- Increasing fruit and vegetable consumption is also a priority objective of the National Obesity Strategy 2022-2023.¹¹
- 6.1% of adults, and 8.5% of children met both fruit and vegetable recommendations.¹²
- New research on household family shopping baskets has confirmed that eating a diet based on whole and fresh foods is still the cheapest option – despite consumer price index increases. The average saving of a healthy diet ranges from \$63 up to \$78 per week (depending on postcode).¹³
- Food production has a significant impact on the environment, there is a growing body of evidence which suggested plant-based diets have a lower environmental impact.¹⁴⁻¹⁵

Indicator 2. Exclusive breastfeeding

Percentage of infants exclusively breastfed in the first six months.

Rationale for inclusion:

- Breastfeeding is the healthiest start for infants. Breastfeeding confers infant protection against infection, some chronic diseases including type 1 and type 2 diabetes, coeliac disease, and inflammatory bowel disease, is associated with lower cardiovascular disease risk factors including high blood pressure and elevated total and LDL cholesterol and obesity. Breastfeeding also contributes to improved cognitive development and has been associated with an IQ increase of 3 to 4 points.¹⁶
- Maternal benefits include reduced risk of ovarian and breast cancer, as well as a reduced risk of developing type 2 diabetes among women with a history of gestational diabetes.¹⁶
- Increased breastfeeding is associated with US\$302 billion annually in additional income, equating to nearly 0.5 per cent of world gross national income.¹⁷
- The WHO, the United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF)¹⁸ and the Australian Infant Feeding Guidelines recommend that infants be exclusively breastfed for the first six months.¹⁹
- The Australian National Breastfeeding Strategy 2019 and beyond aims to increase the proportion of babies who are exclusively breastfed to six months. Monitoring Australia’s performance and progress is a key element of the Strategy.²⁰
- The National Preventive Health Strategy includes a target to increase the rate of exclusive breastfeeding in the first six months up to at least 50%,¹⁰ in line with the WHO global target.²¹
- One in three (35.4%) of babies are exclusively breastfed to six months in Australia.²²
- Globally exclusive breastfeeding rates are monitored by the WHO Global Nutrition Monitoring Framework.²³
- In Australia, research indicates that the current human milk production levels exceed \$3 billion annually. Failure to account for mothers’ milk production in gross domestic product (GDP) and other economic data has important consequences for public policy. The value of human milk can be measured using accepted international guidelines for calculating national income and production. It is quantitatively nontrivial and should be counted in GDP.²⁴
- Breastfeeding is the most sustainable food source. It does not burden the planet with waste requiring disposal. By comparison, the commercial milk formula industry has a significant impact on planetary health considering its effects on climate change, water use and pollution.²⁵⁻²⁶

Indicator 3. Food security

Percentage of household income spent on food.

Rationale for inclusion:

- In Australia, food security is not measured at a population level regularly or consistently. There is a critical need to implement a routine, robust food security monitoring and surveillance system in Australia.²⁷
- Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.²⁸
- Food insecurity exists whenever the availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods, or the ability to acquire acceptable food in socially acceptable ways is limited or uncertain. Food insecurity rarely happens in isolation but rather in co-occurrence with economic, health and housing insecurity and other hardships.
- It is estimated 4% to 13% of the general population are food insecure; and 22% to 32% of the Indigenous population, depending on location.²⁹ 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.²⁹
- Reasons for food insecurity vary and can include material hardship, limited financial resources, difficulty accessing affordable healthy foods or limited health and nutrition literacy.²⁹
- For children, food insecurity can have negative short- and long-term effects academically, socially, emotionally, physically, and developmentally.²⁹
- Spending 30 per cent or more of household income on food places families in financial stress.³⁰ However, latest data from the Illawarra, New South Wales, suggested low-income households spend some 33% of their income on food. This percentage could be reduced to 27% when eating a healthy diet.¹³
- Globally, several tools are used to measure food security including the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) -Food Insecurity Experience Scale the global food security index³¹ and World Food Programme food security indicators³² are used to measure food security across countries. While the United States Department of Agriculture – Economic Research Service household food security survey module is an example of a national module.³³
- Food can be a powerful driver of change: The EAT-Lancet Commission outlines a planetary health diet and targets for sustainable food production that, when combined, can prevent 11 million premature adult deaths per year and drive the transition toward a sustainable global food system by 2050.³⁴
- A sustainable global food system by 2050 means sufficiently healthy food for all with no additional land use conversion for food, protection of biodiversity, reduced water use, decreased nitrogen and phosphorus loss to waterways, net zero carbon dioxide emissions, and significantly lower levels of methane and nitrous oxide emissions.³⁵

Summary

Dietitians Australia supports the development of a national framework for measuring well-being and progress. The three core indicators proposed, fruit and vegetable consumption, exclusive breastfeeding and food security are all highly interconnected and will enable the Government to measure what matters to improve the lives of all Australians.

Dietitians Australia welcomes the opportunity to provide ongoing support for the consultation and can provide additional robust national and international evidence to support the suggested indicators.

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Appendix 1. Criteria for indicators

Criteria	Fruit and Vegetable Consumption	Exclusive Breastfeeding	Food Security
Relevant	Australian Dietary Guidelines National Preventive Health Strategy National Obesity Strategy	Infant Feeding Guidelines National Breastfeeding Strategy National Preventive Health Strategy National Obesity Strategy	National Preventive Health Strategy
Complete	As above	As above	As above
Measurable	Existing ABS data National Health Survey	Existing ABS data Digital Child Health Record National Health Survey Australian National Infant Feeding Survey	Existing longitudinal studies (limited)
Comparable	Existing Global data	Existing Global data WHO global nutrition monitor framework UNICEF global database	Existing Global data World Food Programme Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
Reliable	Yes	Yes	Yes

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<p>Understandable</p>	<p>The Go for 2&5 fruit and vegetable campaign is one of Australia’s most well know healthy eating campaign to date. More recent campaigns include school-based education such as Crunch&Sip (NSW).</p>	<p>Most mothers in Australia initiate breastfeeding (96%), but these rates drop off as babies grow, with only 1 in 3 babies exclusively breastfed until 6 months of age.</p>	<p>Climate and health related events such as drought, floods, bush fires and pandemics have impacted the cost of living. This is front page news almost daily. For example: The 2022 cost of lettuce, petrol, house prices, interest rates.</p>
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