

QLD Mental Health Community Support Services – Psychosocial Supports

**Response to consultation
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Recipient

QLD Department of Health: Mental Health, Alcohol and Other Drugs Strategy and Planning Branch

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Dietitians Australia acknowledges all traditional custodians of the lands, waters and seas that we work and live on across Australia. We pay our respect to Elders past, present and future and thank them for their continuing custodianship.

The leading voice in nutrition and dietetics

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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 the profession and the people and communities we serve.

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 important roles in mental health and psychosocial disability.

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

Recommendations

Dietitians Australia recommends that the Queensland Government ensures:

1. all psychosocial support programs across the State include nutrition education as a component of self-management that compliments clinical treatments
2. nutrition education as part of psychosocial supports is designed and delivered in collaboration with Accredited Practising Dietitians and people with lived experience.

Discussion

Consultation paper question 1: How could the existing Mental Health Community Support Service be further strengthened to increase access and engagement?

Nutrition considerations are an important aspect of treatment of any mental illness and nutrition can play a vital role in self-management. For people living with mental illness and psychosocial disability, addressing the impacts of these conditions on the person's ability to nourish and hydrate themselves adequately is imperative. Nutrition provides a critical foundation for health and wellbeing.

Mental illnesses and psychosocial disability can both impact a person's nutrition status and eating behaviours. They can affect a person's ability to shop for, prepare and consume nutritious foods, to manage their intake and to remain hydrated. Often food security can also be affected. It is therefore imperative that nutrition form part of the delivery of psychosocial disability services across the State. Evidence-based nutrition education, co-designed with and delivered by Accredited Practising Dietitians, needs to be a core component of self-management education programs.

There is a strong and growing body of evidence to support the role of diet and dietary interventions in mental health and mental illness. Systematic reviews clearly demonstrate that dietary patterns consistent with the Australian Dietary Guidelines and those that are typical of a Mediterranean-style diet can lower the risk of depression.^{1, 2}

Large population-based studies, and reviews, have also shown strong associations between diet quality and mental health.²⁻⁶ One example including over 10,000 participants showed that a Mediterranean dietary pattern was associated with a reduced risk of developing depression.⁵ Other studies have demonstrated that high intakes of discretionary foods such as sweets, highly processed cereals, chips, fast-food and sugar sweetened drinks increases the risk of poor mental health.^{1, 2, 7, 8}

Dietary interventions delivered by an Accredited Practising Dietitian to promote mental health is supported by increasingly well-described links between nutritional status and mental wellbeing,⁹⁻¹¹ the role of the microbiome in the functional changes leading to mental illness,¹² many studies

supporting a link between nutrition and behaviour and mood^{3, 4, 13} and evidence demonstrating the effectiveness of dietary intervention to improve symptoms and induce remission of depression.^{10, 13-17}

Some psychotropic medications commonly prescribed to treat symptoms of various mental illnesses have known metabolic side effects, including changes in blood lipids, impacts on glucose regulation and significant weight changes. These effects can increase the risk of poor health outcomes and are preventable through evidence-based dietary interventions.

Dietitians Australia's [Mental Health Briefing Paper](#) provides further information on the important role of Accredited Practising Dietitians and nutrition in mental health.

Psychosocial supports offer an opportunity to provide practical help that reinforces the messages shared by clinicians. For example, dietary advice and education delivered by Accredited Practising Dietitians can be reinforced through cooking classes or other social activities that involve food as part of self-management education. Through using these types of opportunities, nutrition education can build on the messages delivered during sessions with the Accredited Practising Dietitians. This provides the opportunity for individuals to put theory into practice in a safe and supportive environment and supports them to achieve their health goals through self-management.

Nutrition education provided as part of self-management that includes practical sessions like cooking classes can help with multiple aspects of psychosocial functional impairment and can further facilitate recovery. Practical classes offer the opportunity for participants to build social skills, build and maintain social connections, re-engage in daily activities, address their physical health goals and manage the effects of their illness.²¹⁻²⁵

Dietitians Australia would welcome the opportunity to collaborate with the Queensland Government in the co-design of evidence-based nutrition education for delivery in psychosocial services across the State.

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