

# National Adaptation Plan Issues Paper

**Response to consultation  
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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.

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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 an important role in supporting healthy and sustainable food systems and dietary patterns.

This submission was prepared by members of the Dietitians Australia Food and Environmental Interest Group. The Interest Group includes Dietitians Australia members with wide ranging expertise in areas including public health, food systems and academia.

## Summary

Dietitians Australia supports the development of a National Adaptation Plan to ensure Australia is prepared for and can mitigate risks of climate change. This includes the impact of climate change on food security, nutrition and health outcomes.

A well-adapted and resilient Australia will provide food and nutrition security for all Australians, at all times. Below outlines key points for consideration as part of the development of the Plan.

### The role of dietitians

Accredited Practising Dietitians are working already to increase awareness and provide guidance on adapting and preventing the impacts of climate change on health and the impacts of dietary patterns on planetary health. 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, in nutrition education to client groups, community groups and other health professionals, and medical nutrition therapy at the group and individual level. Further information is available in the Dietitians Australia positions statement on Healthy and Sustainable diets and the Role statement for dietitians working in food and environment sector.<sup>1,2</sup> We need to bolster these current efforts of dietitians to support food system changes and promote food and nutrition security.

### National Nutrition Policy

Since 1992, there has been no new National Nutrition Policy in Australia. A well-adapted and resilient Australia requires an updated National Nutrition Policy.<sup>3</sup> 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 reduce the incidence, prevalence and cost of diet-related health problems and promote human and planetary health. A new National Nutrition Policy would look to provide food and nutrition security for all Australians with a commitment to equitable action. This policy would involve departments beyond health and consider the role of sectors such as agriculture and trade.<sup>3</sup>

### **Healthy and sustainable dietary patterns**

In Australia, the way our food is produced, manufactured, distributed and consumed is contributing to climate change and malnutrition in all its forms.<sup>2,4</sup>

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. This is critical for a well-adapted and resilient Australia. 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.

In facilitating the uptake of healthy and sustainable diets, dietitians are contributing to the transformation of our current food system that is urgently required to nourish present and future generations within planetary boundaries. For more information about our position, see our position statement on healthy and sustainable diets.<sup>2</sup>

### **Planetary Health as a strategic priority**

In an ideal future state, planetary health would be a strategic priority, that is incorporated into all levels of policy (local, state, federal) and across all industries. This includes consideration in dietary guidelines and food and nutrition policy. A coordinated approach from multiple stakeholders is needed to strengthen adaptation action. This includes local, state and federal governments, organisations, communities and individuals.

### **Health and Social Support**

Dietitians Australia recommends that health and social support be the priority of highest focus in the first National Adaptation Plan. Integration with the National Health and Climate Strategy is essential. To ensure a well-adapted and resilient Australia, plans would be in place for health services and professionals to mitigate the impact of climate events and natural disasters on the health and wellbeing of their communities. This includes consideration of food security and access to medical supplies.

Food security is not measured at the population level regularly or consistently in Australia.<sup>5</sup> The last national figures are over 10 years old and since then more recent measures have suggested that food security is impacting on many in Australia.<sup>5,6</sup> For example, the Foodbank Hunger Report 2023 stated that in 2023, 3.7 million Australian households (36%) experienced moderate to severe food insecurity.<sup>6</sup> 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.<sup>5</sup>

This relationship between our food system and our climate is bidirectional. Climate change and poor environmental conditions affects our food supply and security, for example through decreased crop yield, availability and quality, which adversely affects health.<sup>7</sup> Food insecurity impacts on people's

health, quality of life, social and emotional wellbeing, and productivity. It impacts on the resilience of populations. Addressing food security must be a core component of the national adaptation plan.

Achieving resilience in Health and Social Support from a food and nutrition perspective is highly dependent on these three additional priority areas: Regional, remote and First Nations communities, Cross-system Supply chains and Primary industries and food.

### **Governance, implementation and evaluation**

The National Adaptation Plan must be supported by a well-resourced implementation plan. Furthermore, there must be an evaluation plan to monitor progress and strong governance models in place for effective oversight.

## **References**

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