

# Dietitians Australia Priorities for the Northern Territory Election 2024

73 Accredited Practising Dietitians work across all settings in the Northern Territory. Dietitians Australia is calling on the newly elected Northern Territory Government to commit to the following priorities:

## Priority 1

**Embed 6 new full-time dietetic staff within NT Health to service communities and regions of high need, including for example dual-banded Dietitians and Diabetes Educator positions within the next two years.**

**Cost: Estimated \$760,000 - \$1 million**

### The need:

- Remote NT has the highest burden of diabetes in the world
- Iron deficiency anaemia rates among children are the highest in Australia, with 20% of children under 12 months of age anaemic
- 15% of Aboriginal children under five years old in the NT suffer from chronic malnutrition compared to 2% nationally
- The Northern Territory has the highest proportion of First Nations residents among its population, at about 31%. Diet is one of the leading preventable risk factors for diabetes and heart disease, which are among the leading causes of premature death for First Nations males and females in the Territory.

### Background:

There is an urgent need to fund dietetic positions, including in chronic disease and mental health units in the Northern Territory.

There is currently only one full-time community dietitian to service the Darwin urban region, and there is a patient waitlist of six months.

There are two renal dietitians to cover all renal patients in the Top End, Big Rivers and East Arnhem. There are ~1000 Territorians with Chronic Kidney Disease stages 3b-5 and/or undergoing dialysis requiring specialist dietitian input. No public clinical dietetic service exists for people who qualify for dietetic care under chronic disease management plans.

There is no dietetic service at the Darwin prison despite this being a location with substantial chronic disease support needs.

The leading voice in nutrition and dietetics

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Specialist dietetic positions, including dual-banded positions such as Diabetes Educator/Dietitian must be embedded in the NT Health workforce and integrated as part of multidisciplinary teams to address this urgent gap in dietetic and nutrition care.

## **Priority 2**

**Strengthen the licensing requirements, develop a monitoring and evaluation system for the Northern Territory Remote Stores Program, and fund 2 new senior full-time dietitian positions based within existing project teams in Darwin and Alice Springs.**

**Cost: \$300,000 (cost to fund dietetic positions only)**

### **Details:**

There is an opportunity to ensure that dietitians play a leading role in coordinating and evaluating the Northern Territory Remote Stores Program. Dietitians Australia is advocating for 2 new senior full-time dietitian positions to be established as part of this project, based within existing project teams in Darwin and Alice Springs.

Standards for the Northern Territory Remote Stores Program are currently open for community consultation. Dietitians Australia is urging the newly elected Northern Territory Government to commit to stringent licensing requirements when it comes to the promotion and placement of unhealthy food and beverages in remote stores. Specifically, we advocate the following restrictions are legislated and enforced as part of the program:

- a) No promotional activity on unhealthy food and beverages, including no price promotions or discounts, no volume promotions (e.g., 2-for-1 deals), and no other display material (e.g. posters, shelf stripping),
- b) No availability of unhealthy food and beverages in high traffic areas, including store entrance, checkout area and counter, and front-, between- and end-of-aisle displays,
- c) No placement of sugary soft drinks of more than 600ml in refrigerators,
- d) < 40% of refrigerator facings made up of sugar sweetened beverages.

A robust monitoring and evaluation system must be implemented to ensure the efficacy and compliance of the standards, including streamlining data collection, routine reporting on the program, and ensuring the data is publicly available.

## **Priority 3**

**Commit to funding 6 full-time equivalent Accredited Practising Dietitians to coordinate, monitor and evaluate a comprehensive program to guide healthy eating in NT Schools (urban and remote).**

**Cost: \$900,000**

### **Details:**

The Northern Territory lags behind other states including QLD, NSW, VIC and WA, where direct Government funding is provided for school canteen and school nutrition programs.

A comprehensive, community appropriate program must be developed for the Northern Territory to ensure children are supported to develop healthy eating habits within the school environment, where the majority of their food intake happens throughout the week.

To lead this program, Dietitians Australia is calling on the NT Government to commit to employing 6 Accredited Practising Dietitians, one dedicated to each region, to coordinate and enable the successful implementation of the NT School Nutrition and Healthy Eating Policy Guidelines (urban and remote).

*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.*