

# Dietitians Australia priorities for the new Queensland Government

There are currently ~600 Accredited Practising Dietitians (APDs) working in Queensland Health Services and more than 2,000 APDs working across all settings in Queensland. Queensland's dietitians are passionate about providing high-quality, targeted nutrition care to all people who access the healthcare system. Dietitians Australia and the Dietitians Australia Queensland Branch have identified two key priorities for the newly elected Queensland Government to address.

## **Priority 1: Provide all Queensland public schools with ongoing access to community health Accredited Practising Dietitians to facilitate co-designed nutrition support programs**

**Our ask:** Dietitians Australia calls on the Queensland Government to improve the nutrition intake and wellbeing of school-aged children by introducing dietitian-led support nutrition programs across all public schools. These programs should be implemented in all 1067 State schools, with a focus on primary school-aged students, and should include bi-monthly on-site visits from Accredited Practising Dietitians. Additionally, we recommend funding a minimum of 3 full-time positions within the Queensland Association of School Tuckshops to support these efforts.

**Cost:** \$16.5 million (annual continuous funding)

**Background:** Ensuring Queensland children establish strong nutrition foundations is essential for their healthy development, learning capacity, physical and mental well-being. Accredited Practising Dietitians can play a foundational role in creating a supportive food environment, working with teachers and other health professionals to tailor nutrition programs to the unique needs of each school.

Dietitians will work on-site to support a range of initiatives specific to each individual school environment, including supporting the Queensland Association of School Tuckshops' Healthy School Tuckshops Program, Health and Wellbeing Queensland's Pick of the Crop program, and Smart Choices Strategy. Dietitians can provide support to health professionals within the school community relating to nutrition and weight stigma, provide professional development for teachers to enhance food nutrition literacy into their lesson planning, and offer practical guidance on meal planning and food provision in programs like school breakfast and lunch initiatives.

The leading voice in nutrition and dietetics

**A** PO Box 2087 Woden ACT 2606 | **T** 02 6189 1200

**E** [info@dietitiansaustralia.org.au](mailto:info@dietitiansaustralia.org.au) | **W** [dietitiansaustralia.org.au](http://dietitiansaustralia.org.au)

Dietitians Association of Australia | **ABN** 34 008 521 480

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## **Priority 2: Ensure the equitable integration of the dietetic workforce across Queensland Health, prioritising Queensland Mental Health services**

**Our ask:** Almost half of all Queenslanders live with a mental health condition at some point in their lives. The 2022 Queensland Mental Health Select Committee Inquiry recommended that dietitians be integrated into the mental health workforce to provide holistic care for people experiencing both mental and physical health conditions. Adequate funding must be allocated across the mental health service continuum to ensure Queenslanders have access to dietetic care for supporting the prevention, management, and treatment of mental health conditions.

**Cost:** Further investment in workforce data collection, analysis and integration is required to identify gaps in service provision across state-wide services.

**Background:** Dietitians play a crucial role in supporting people with nutrition therapy, and there is a growing body of evidence demonstrating how powerful this support is for mental health conditions. Dietitians provide essential support for people living with any mental health condition and related illness, including malnutrition and chronic diseases. Currently, there is no robust public data on the dietetic workforce's integration into Queensland Mental Health Services. There appears to be major disparities in access to dietitians, especially in areas of critical need like eating disorders.

The Queensland Government must prioritise investment in the nutrition and dietetic workforce, and ensure equitable funding is distributed across services to provide Queenslanders with the nutrition support they need for mental health conditions. Dietitians are a critical player in the multidisciplinary team when it comes to enhancing mental and physical health through personalised nutrition care and must be fully utilised and accessible to better the health of Queenslanders.