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Dietitians the vital link to aged care quality

Commencing today, Commonwealth subsidised residential aged care homes are required to collect and report on three clinical quality indicators: unplanned weight loss, pressure injuries and use of physical restraint, under the National Aged Care Mandatory Quality Indicator Program.

The Dietitians Association of Australia (DAA) calls for all residential aged care homes to engage their local Accredited Practising Dietitian (APD) to ensure action is taken when unplanned weight loss is recorded and to implement nutrition policies which promote quality care.

“The greater the health impact, the more challenging it is for a resident to regain their health. While the National Aged Care Mandatory Quality Indicator Program ensures the recording of valuable information, for some residents, acting at this point will be too late. It is critical to implement food and nutrition support to prevent the deterioration of residents’ health,” said DAA CEO Robert Hunt.

Nutrition is a key component of the three quality indicators. Malnutrition, poor appetite, muscle loss, illness and medications, are all common causes of unplanned weight loss. Impacts of ageing such as a decrease in sense of taste and smell, changes to oral health, swallowing difficulties, and reduced nutrient absorption also contribute to weight decline.

Unplanned weight loss leads to a loss in muscle and fat stores, heightening the risk of pressure injuries. Without adequate intake of protein and energy, wound healing is delayed, further exacerbating health issues. Malnutrition can also arise from the use of physical restraints.

“APDs are key to managing the nutrition care of older Australians. They identify nutrition health issues and implement a food-focused solution. Across clinical and food service areas, APDs have the skills to assess and enhance care provided, supporting residents to optimise their health,” said Mr Hunt.

Malnutrition is already identified as a significant issue for aged care residents across Australia with a prevalence of up to 50%¹. This clearly highlights the importance of food and nutrition as we age. Yet APDs, who are trained nutrition professionals, remain a greatly underutilised resource within the aged care sector.

“Older Australians have cared for all of us at some point in our lives. We now have a duty of care to provide adequate nutrition that is vital for their physical and mental health. Engaging an APD in both community and residential care is critical to support older Australians’ quality of life through quality care,” said Mr Hunt.

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¹Dietitians Association of Australia. [Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety: DAA submission](#). March 2019

For further information or to organise an interview with Robert Hunt, contact Pattie King, Dietitians Association of Australia on 0409 661 920