

Friday 1 November 2019

Malnutrition in aged care: one quarter of submissions just the tip of the iceberg

One in four submissions to the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety outline accounts of appalling food and rates of malnutrition in aged care. The shocking evidence detailed in the Commission's Interim report¹, shows the critical need to elevate nutrition within all aspects of aged care to adequately nourish older Australians.

The Commission's report, titled '*Neglect*' calls for immediate action to support older Australians to stay in their homes. As the devastating impact of malnutrition continues to rise, the need for nutrition awareness, screening and access to appropriate food and dietetic services in the community has never been greater.

Working in community aged care, Accredited Practising Dietitian (APD), Sharon Lawrence, spoke to the Commission about the dire consequences malnutrition has on an older person's health.

"Unintended weight loss in older people increases the risk of infection, impairs wound healing, decreases muscle mass and affects the ability to complete activities of daily living, with greater impact as malnutrition continues. There are approximately 1.14 million older Australians at risk of malnutrition in the community^{2,3}, and their health will only continue to decline, unless appropriate food and nutrition support is provided," said Lawrence.

Appearing before the Commission in July, Dietitians Association of Australia CEO, Robert Hunt and Lawrence highlighted the need for accountability and significant funding within aged care to ensure better clinical and quality of life outcomes for older Australians.

"Access to food and nutrition is a basic human right, which is essential for the physical, mental, social and emotional wellbeing for older Australians. Prioritising nutrition is imperative to reverse the neglect of older people in Australia," said Lawrence.

Developing and implementing a National Nutrition Policy that encompasses the health of all older Australians living both in the community and in residential aged care is vital. This would ensure prioritisation of nutrition, through screening, assessment, care planning, adequate food and fluid delivery, support during mealtimes and staff education and training.

"We commend the Commission on the vital work they are continuing to do, in uncovering the multifaceted and systemic issues in aged care," said Lawrence.

ENDS

**For further information or to organise an interview with Sharon Lawrence, APD,
contact Pattie King, Dietitians Association of Australia on 0409 661 920**

¹ Commonwealth of Australia. Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety – Interim Report: Neglect. 2019. Available from: <https://agedcare.royalcommission.gov.au/publications/Pages/interim-report.aspx>

² Visvanathan R, Macintosh C, Callary M, et al. The nutritional status of 250 older Australian recipients of domiciliary care services and its association with outcomes at 12 months. *J Am Geriatr Soc*, 51(7):1007-11. Available from: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/12834523>

³ Rist G, Miles G, Karimi L. The presence of malnutrition in community-living older adults receiving home nursing services. *Nutr Diet*, 2012, 69:46-50. Available from: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1747-0080.2011.01572.x>