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Urgent focus needed to reduce the impact of poor nutrition

Australia's poor nutrition report card demands a coordinated response in the form of a National Nutrition Policy; this is one of the key areas highlighted in [Dietitians Australia's recent response](#) to the development of the National Preventive Health Strategy.

It has been almost 30 years since we had policy that addressed the impact of nutrition at a national scale. Our country has since been paying the price of overlooking the importance nutrition and food environments have in preventing chronic disease.

"Food and nutrition are not just health issues. Many sectors such as education, transport, agriculture, infrastructure, and social services play a role in food access, affordability and food choices. Through creating supportive food environments, Australians will be better equipped to make good decisions for their health," said Robert Hunt, CEO of Dietitians Australia.

Now, more than ever, Australians need guidance in ways to put their physical and mental health first. Data from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare indicates that if Australians ate a healthy diet, total burden of heart disease would halve, and the burden of type 2 diabetes and diet-related cancers would drop by over a third¹. Less than 4% of Australians eat a diet which meets the current dietary guidelines², showing that we need to provide more support to those wanting to change their lifestyle.

"Community awareness of food and nutrition and its impact on health — including its role in mental health — is paramount. When it comes to lifestyle related chronic disease, prevention is better than a cure. We must embrace innovation so we can continue to build health amidst this pandemic," said Hunt.

Dietitians Australia also outlines the following areas which would support Australians to make healthier food choices now and into the future, including:

- A strengths-based approach to food and nutrition support for vulnerable populations
- Re-orientating the food supply to support health and ecological sustainability
- Increasing ease for Australians to access an Accredited Practising Dietitian (APD) – via streamlining referral pathways, service delivery and through expanding community public health roles
- Regular evaluation and review of key food and nutrition initiatives
- Investing in government-funded research to better understand evolving health behaviours and sustainable foods systems

With submissions for feedback on the development of the National Preventive Health Strategy now closed, Dietitians Australia is looking with interest to review the draft strategy and seeing the priority given to nutrition.

"A healthy diet is key to a healthier Australia. We must ensure that Australians have access to more affordable and sustainable food and are equipped with the knowledge to make informed food choices for their health," said Hunt.

ENDS

For media enquiries and interviews contact Pattie King, Dietitians Australia 0409 661 920

¹Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. Australian Burden of Disease Study: impact and causes of illness and death in Australia 2011. Canberra: AIHW; 2016.

²Australian Bureau of Statistics (2016) Australian Health Survey: Consumption of Food Groups from the Australian Dietary Guidelines 2011-12. Available from: <https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/4364.0.55.012main+features12011-12>

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Note to Editors: Dietitians Australia (DA) is the leading voice of nutrition in Australia, representing dietitians nationally and advocating for healthier communities. Accredited Practising Dietitian (APD) is the only national credential recognised by the Australian Government as the quality standard for nutrition and dietetics services in Australia. For more information, including DA's media releases and position on topical nutrition issues, visit www.dietitiansaustralia.org.au.