



6 April 2020

Senator the Hon Richard Colbeck
Minister for Aged Care and Senior Australians
PO Box 603
DEVONPORT TAS 7310

By email: senator.colbeck@aph.gov.au

Dear Minister

On behalf of the Dietitians Association of Australia (DAA), I write to express our grave concerns regarding recent data for **'unintentional weight loss'** sourced from the second quarterly report of the **National Aged Care Mandatory Quality Indicator Program**.

It is alarming to see that in the [October-December 2019 quarter](#), 14,733 aged care residents recorded significant unplanned weight loss (i.e. three or more kilograms) and 15,398 residents recorded consecutive unplanned weight loss (i.e. a loss of any amount every month over three consecutive months) compared to the previous period. The accelerated rate of almost **3,000 more residents recording significant unplanned weight loss** in the last quarter compared to the previous period is unacceptable and cause for serious alarm and prompt action.

Accredited Practising Dietitians (APDs) are an essential part of the solution to reverse the escalating rates of unintended weight loss and malnutrition in residential aged care. Yet the current aged care system means that APD services are sadly an afterthought, typically called upon by aged care providers when significant amounts of weight have been lost and malnutrition is well established. The current lack of provision of adequate food and fluids and access to APD services represents **elder abuse by neglect or omission**.

In light of the appalling unintentional weight loss statistics, DAA is calling on the Australian Government to:

- Develop and implement a 'Nutrition Care Policy' in all residential aged care homes that includes an onsite Accredited Practising Dietitian (as a consultant or employee) supported by a multidisciplinary governance structure encompassing:
 - auditing of food and nutrition systems
 - malnutrition screening
 - nutrition assessment
 - nutrition care planning
 - menu planning
 - meal reviews, mealtime environment reviews

- assistance with eating and drinking
- staff nutrition education and ongoing training

- Ensure the framework for 'Malnutrition screening' (as part of the 'Nutrition Care Policy' for residential aged care, outlined above) incorporates a validated screening tool, with monthly follow-up embedded in the assessment process. The framework for malnutrition screening must include initial and ongoing training of all care staff and support workers working in residential aged care in use of the screening tool, prompt referral of all identified as being malnourished or at risk of malnutrition to an Accredited Practising Dietitian and minimum standards for the documentation of screening results and follow up.

- Establish a multidisciplinary team within residential aged care homes to plan, implement and monitor food and nutrition services which includes an Accredited Practising Dietitian, food service staff, nursing staff, care workers, family/carers and volunteers.

- Ensure that the funding model to replace ACFI includes consideration of the cost of fundamental components of care, including:
 - ongoing access to Accredited Practising Dietitians
 - food ingredients
 - nutrition supplements e.g. high energy high protein commercial supplements under the direction of an APD

We would welcome a meeting to discuss this vital issue and outline the proposed solutions in greater detail and will get in touch with your office to make the necessary arrangements.

Yours sincerely



Robert Hunt
Chief Executive Officer