

Wednesday 11 November 2020

Promising changes ahead for older Australians

The elevation of nutrition in aged care is a welcomed inclusion of the proposed recommendations presented by the Counsel Assisting the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety.

In a response to the recommendations made, Dietitians Australia commends the Counsel for putting nutrition first.

“Good food and nutrition are important to healthy ageing – for both physical and mental health. Australians living in residential aged care homes have no choice but to eat the food provided, so it’s promising to see the quality of meals being prioritised,” said Robert Hunt, CEO of Dietitians Australia.

“In a survey by the Commission looking at quality of care, food was raised as a key concern by older Australians. Food is a practical way to support quality of life and it must be at the core of care.”

Dietitians Australia welcomes the proposal to implement requirements for meals to meet each resident’s nutritional needs, as well as being desirable to eat and culturally appropriate. The suggested increase of funding for basic care in aged care homes is also encouraging.

“We’ve all heard the shocking statistics of [less than \\$6 per day](#) being spent on meals for residents, and the proposal to provide extra funding for basic care is a positive move. However, we would also like to see requirements for some of this funding to be used to ensure the meals are nutritionally adequate,” said Hunt.

To help maintain the health of older Australians, Dietitians Australia also highlights the importance of regular malnutrition screening.

“While we are supportive of a quality indicator program, the current system only identifies when malnutrition has occurred. Switching to the use of a validated malnutrition screening tool would help catch malnutrition in action rather than when the damage is already done,” said Hunt.

Dietitians Australia welcomes the recommendations to workforce planning for aged care and on-going professional development for staff, highlighting the importance of food and nutrition training.

“As food is such an integral part of every day, upskilling all staff with basic knowledge of the nutrition requirements for older Australians will better equip them to identify and escalate nutrition issues.”

However, the omission of minimum staff time standards for allied health was surprising. Other countries, such as Canada, report that aged care residents receive an average of [22 minutes of allied health services](#) per day. Australia trails behind, providing approximately 8 minutes of allied health care per resident each day.

“Older Australians deserve access to the best possible care. We would like to see an allied health minimum time benchmark set. This will encourage aged care services to appropriately engage their dietitian, whose role spans across food service, mealtimes, and individual patient care,” said Hunt.

“Overall, the proposed recommendations are promising, and we look forward to the final report being handed down early next year.”

The Commission is accepting responses to the recommendations made by the Counsel Assisting until 4pm AEDT, Thursday 12 November 2020. Read more about Dietitians Australia’s response [here](#).

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

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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.