

PUBLICATION DETAILS: Dietitians Association of Australia

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## **TOPIC 5: A long-term national health strategy**

The Dietitians Association of Australia represents approximately 3500 members and as such is the largest professional nutrition-focused body in Australia. Dietitians are employed in a wide variety of areas including clinical dietetics, public health and community nutrition, education, food service and management, private sector, government, research, industry, public relations, marketing and communications. DAA makes the following points.

### **Good Nutrition is central to the health of the nation.**

DAA believes that a proactive and committed approach to food and nutrition issues is fundamental to the long term health of all Australians. In recent times it has been concerning that nutrition issues have been relegated to a 'healthy lifestyle message' rather than being viewed as a key contributor to the health of the nation.

### **A coordinated approach to collecting and communicating fundamental nutrition information for the population is needed.**

Monitoring and surveillance of the food supply and the food intake of the population is necessary to support the development of interventions that improve the nutrition of our population. Such interventions include a regular cycle of dietary guidelines and complementary food guides for all population subgroups.

It is unfortunate that these key government activities are currently approached in an ad hoc and uncoordinated way. For example in 2008 we do not have dietary guidelines that reflect the government's own nutrient reference values which were released in 2005.

### **Activities across the health continuum are needed to address overnutrition and undernutrition**

The government needs to better support nutrition activities across the continuum of health, from prevention to treatment. Improving the nutrition of the population is essential if we are to address the growing burden of chronic disease. While concerns of overnutrition (eg. obesity) are rightfully under the government and community spotlight, DAA is also extremely concerned at the overwhelming impact of undernutrition in Australia, in particular in our ageing population. Studies have reported a prevalence of malnutrition in the aged population of between 40-85%. Malnutrition is a hidden epidemic in Australia which leads to many poor medical outcomes, most of which are very expensive to manage and have a devastating impact on the quality of life for many.

**We need a skilled nutrition and dietetic workforce.**

Australia needs a skilled nutrition and dietetic workforce across the health continuum. This includes dietitians to work with individuals, with other health professionals offering comprehensive care and intersectorally with the range of food and nutrition stakeholders at a population level to create environments for better nutrition.

**Food security and issues of equity must be addressed.**

Nutrition is an equity issue in Australia with the most vulnerable and disadvantaged such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, the aged and the poor carrying a disproportionate burden of nutrition-related ill health and disease. These groups are experiencing greater difficulties in accessing and affording a healthy diet. While attending to these immediate needs we must also address the food security of our nation in the context of climate change as food insecurity will eventually affect us all.