



MEDIA RELEASE

March 2010

Residents in aged care facilities malnourished

Australia's peak nutrition body is calling on the Government to tackle 'shocking' rates of malnutrition in Australia's aged care facilities, where around one in two residents is malnourished¹.

In its submission to the Government's Aged Care Funding Instrument (ACFI) review², the Dietitians Association of Australia (DAA) called for routine nutrition screening, and better support for nursing and other care staff to feed and weigh residents and monitor their food intake.

DAA's President Julie Dundon said: 'We've heard so much about obesity but at the other end of the scale malnutrition is causing unnecessary suffering. Malnourished aged care residents are at higher risk of falls and fractures, infections like bed ulcers, and medical complications – all at a huge cost to the tax payer.'

Ms Dundon said unintentional weight loss needed to be picked up early and steps put in place to improve the nutritional status of these residents.

'Pharmacists are already funded to regularly review the medicines taken by residents. We're suggesting a similar model, where money could be set aside for Accredited Practising Dietitians (APDs) to coordinate routine nutrition screening and carry out nutrition assessments³.'

She said the tragedy of malnutrition is likely to get worse as the Australian population ages.

'As the link between malnutrition and a poorer quality of life and health outcomes is well known, the Government needs to give serious attention to the nutritional care of older people,' said Ms Dundon.

In its submission to the ACFI review DAA also called for:

- Government funding for:
 - aged care residents to be able to better access APDs
 - facility staff to work with APDs on planning nutrition care
 - APDs to work on activities like facility-wide menu assessments, staff training and quality improvement projects
- Publicly available Government reports on the rates of malnutrition in Australia
- National standards for menu planning in the aged care setting
- Mandatory training of aged care staff in correct techniques for weighing and feeding residents.

ENDS

**For further information or to speak with Julie Dundon, contact
Romy Hurwitz, Dietitians Association of Australia, on 0409 661 920.**

Note to Editors: The Dietitians Association of Australia (DAA) is the professional body representing dietitians nationally. Accredited Practising Dietitian (APD) is the only national credential recognised by the Australian Government, Medicare, the Department of Veterans Affairs and most private health funds as the quality standard for nutrition and dietetics services in Australia. For more information visit www.daa.asn.au

Background

- The Dietitians Association of Australia has recently developed comprehensive, evidence-based practice guidelines to help dietitians manage malnutrition.
- The Government subsidises aged care homes to provide care to older people who can no longer remain in their own homes. The amount of Government funding is worked out through the Aged Care Funding Instrument, which was introduced in March 2008⁴.
- In 2009-10, around 210,000 Australians will receive subsidised residential aged care in one of Australia's nearly 2,800 aged care homes. And the Australian Government will provide around \$7 billion to support the provision of these residential aged care services³.
- Between 2011 and 2021, the Australian population aged 65 years and over is projected to grow from three to five million. And the proportion of Australians 85 year and older is projected to increase from 1.6 per cent in 2007 to between 4.9 and 7.3 per cent in 2056⁵.

¹ Gaskill D, Black LJ, Isenring EA, et al. Malnutrition prevalence and nutrition issues in residential aged care facilities. *Australasian Journal of Ageing* 2008; 27:189-94.

² Submission from the Dietitians Association of Australia to the Department of Health and Ageing Review of the Aged Care Funding Instrument. Available at: <http://www.daa.asn.au/index.asp?pageID=2145836818>

³ DAA's Rehabilitation and Aged Care Interest Group Convenor, Karyn Matterson APD, initiated and developed the RNMR concept. Further details on this can be obtained from Karyn on (02) 9216 9003 or via email karyn@dietonline.com.au

⁴ Department of Health and Ageing. New funding model for residential aged care. Available at: <http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/ageing-acfi-review>

⁵ Australian Bureau of Statistics. Scenarios for Australia's ageing population. Available at: <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/2f762f95845417aeca25706c00834efa/95560b5d7449b135ca256e9e001fd879!OpenDocument>