

Importance of Food in Aged Care

Position

The provision of food and fluids to meet the diverse needs of aged care consumers is a complex undertaking, with Dietitians Australia calling on the Government for an investment in:

- **Funding for nutritious food:** by elevating the 'Basic Daily Fee' per resident per day for aged care providers who provide evidence of nutritionally adequate and culturally appropriate meals provided to residents.
- **National Meal Guidelines:** urgent investment is needed to develop evidence-based National Meal Guidelines, including governance and accountability frameworks, for residential aged care providers. The development of governance, monitoring and evaluation frameworks for the existing National Meal Guidelines for home delivered and centre-based meal programs for older Australians is also required.
- **The workforce:** ensuring all aged care providers include an Accredited Practising Dietitian in their multidisciplinary team to plan, implement and monitor food and nutrition services. Also ensuring that all staff receive training in food, nutrition and the dining experience to meet accreditation standards and elevate the standard of food, nutrition and the dining experience for residents.

Recommendations

Funding for nutritious food:

1. Australian Government to provide funding to approved providers of residential aged care, adding to the base amount for the 'Basic Daily Fee' by \$10 per resident per day. The additional funding should be only provided on the condition that the provider conducts an annual review of the adequacy of the food (meals, snacks & beverages) it has provided to meet the nutritional requirements of residents. Providers must prepare a written report annually, in consultation with an Accredited Practising Dietitian, on how food and nutritional requirements have been met.
2. Australian Government to establish a minimum spend within the 'Basic Daily Fee' on food and ingredients for elderly consumers in residential aged care (noting that \$6.08 per aged care resident per day, as found in an Australian study,¹ is grossly insufficient to meet the dietary needs of elderly consumers). An index needs to be applied for providers located in rural and remote locations to cover the additional cost of food transport.

National Meal Guidelines:

3. NHMRC to develop specific dietary guidelines for older adults as part of the current Australian Dietary Guidelines review - to inform food systems & menu planning in aged care.
4. Australian Government to urgently fund:
 - a. The development of evidence-based National Meal Guidelines, including governance and accountability frameworks, for residential aged care providers; and

- b. The establishment of governance, monitoring and evaluation frameworks for the existing National Meal Guidelines for home delivered and centre-based meal programs for older Australians.²

The workforce:

5. Aged care providers to establish a multidisciplinary team within residential aged care and community aged care to plan, implement and monitor food and nutrition services, with input from an Accredited Practising Dietitian, food service staff, nursing staff, care workers, family/carers and volunteers.
6. Introduce a new accreditation requirement that all aged care workers (including care staff and food service staff) must complete training modules on food, nutrition and the dining experience annually, with training from credentialed organisations (like Dietitians Australia) or approved professionals (eg Accredited Practising Dietitians) only.

Background

The right to adequate food is a human right³ and is essential for the physical, mental, social and emotional wellbeing of older Australians. Inadequate government and organisational support are contributing to an unacceptably high prevalence of malnutrition amongst older Australians. The lack of enjoyable nutritious food is a key factor in poor intake, leading to malnutrition, which represents elder abuse by neglect or omission.

References

1. Hugo C, Isenring E, Sinclair D, Agarwal E. 2018. DOI: 10.1111/1747-0080.12368
2. Australian Meals on Wheels Association. Australian Meals on Wheels Association National Meal Guidelines: A Guide for Service Providers, Caterers and Health Professionals Providing Home Delivered and Centre Based Meal Programs for Older Australians 2016. Available from: <https://mealsonwheels.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/NationalMealsGuidelines2016.pdf>
3. Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The United Nations Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (CESCR). Available from: https://www.ohchr.org/EN/UDHR/Documents/UDHR_Translations/eng.pdf