

Thursday 18 May 2017

Australians spending the majority of food budget on junk food

New research shows Australian households spend the majority (58%) of their food budget on discretionary or 'junk' foods and drinks, including take-aways (14%) and sugar-sweetened beverages (4%)¹.

According to Professor Amanda Lee, who is presenting her research at the [Dietitians Association of Australia's National Conference](#) in Hobart this week, healthy diets are more affordable than current (unhealthy) diets – costing households 15 per cent less.

But according to Australian Health Survey data, few Australians consume diets consistent with national recommendations.

“Less than four per cent of Australians eat adequate quantities of healthy foods, yet more than 35 per cent of energy (kilojoule) intake comes from discretionary foods and drinks, which provide little nutrition – and this is hurting our health and our hip pocket,” said Professor Lee, from the Sax Institute.

She said the figures are particularly worrying because poor diet is the leading preventable cause of ill health in Australia and globally, contributing to almost 18 per cent of deaths in Australia², while obesity costs the nation \$58 billion a year³.

Professor Lee, an Accredited Practising Dietitian, added that ill health due to poor diet is not shared equally, with some population groups, such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and people who are disadvantaged socioeconomically, more at risk.

Her research found that, although healthy diets cost less than current (unhealthy) diets, people in low income households need to spend around a third (31%) of their disposable income to eat a healthy diet, so food security is a real problem in these households.

She added that policies that increase the price differential between healthy and unhealthy diets could further compromise food security in vulnerable groups.

“At the moment, basic healthy foods like fresh vegetables and fruit are exempt from the GST, but there's been talk of extending this to all foods. If this were to happen, the cost of a healthy diet would become unaffordable for low-income families,” said Professor Lee.

Professor Lee said Australia needs a coordinated approach to nutrition policy – a call echoed by the Dietitians Association of Australia, the Public Health Association of Australia, the Heart Foundation and Nutrition Australia.

The health groups want the Australian Government to update, fund and implement a [new National Nutrition Policy](#), as the current policy was developed 25 years ago.

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MEDIA RELEASE

For further information or to organise an interview with Professor Amanda Lee, contact Maree Hall on 0408 482 581 or Sally Moloney on 0428 916 425.

Background:

About the Dietitians Association of Australia National Conference

The DAA National Conference is being held from 18-20 May 2017 at the Hobart Grand Chancellor Hotel. For more information and program details, visit: www.daa2017.com.au and follow us on Twitter: www.twitter.com/DAA_feed (and use #DAA2017).

Press passes can be made available for interested media (including Australian-based journalists from print, radio, television and online media outlets) to attend sessions at the conference. To request a press pass, please contact Maree Hall 0408 482 581.

¹¹ Lee AJ, Kane S, Ramsey R, Good E, Dick M. Testing the price and affordability of healthy and current (unhealthy) diets and the potential impacts of policy change in Australia. *BMC Public Health* 2016; **16**: 1–22.

² Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation. Global Burden of Disease data Australia. Available from: <http://www.healthdata.org/gbd/data>; accessed 3 May 2017.

³ Australian Bureau of Statistics. Gender Indicators, Australia. Available from: <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/4125.0main+features3330Jan%202013#Endnote>; accessed 3 May 2017.