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DIETITIANS: ‘WARMTH’ OF THE 2017 HEALTH BUDGET NOT FELT BY ALL

The peak body for dietitians has welcomed measures in last night’s budget to ‘unfreeze’ Medicare, but says 2019 is too long to wait for the changes to filter through to allied health practitioners, such as dietitians.

Dietitians Association of Australia CEO Claire Hewat said under the new measures announced by the Turnbull government last night, the freeze on Medicare rebates for GPs will be lifted in 2018 but for allied health this may not come into effect until 2019.

“While we are happy to see the opportunity of some warmth in the future, unfreezing one limb at a time is not helpful – it does not really improve overall function of the health system or support good health outcomes for Australians,” said Ms Hewat.

She said all the evidence supports well-coordinated multidisciplinary care, but under the gradual Medicare ‘unfreeze’ Australians will be forced to pay more for key parts of their health care, such as nutrition advice and support from an Accredited Practising Dietitian.

Ms Hewat said the thaw on Medicare rebates, while welcome, is expected to cost the Federal Government \$1 billion, while spending on health promotion and prevention, which is needed to build a healthy Australia over time, is small in comparison.

“Based on last night’s budget, expenditure in preventing poor health is likely to continue to make up less than two per cent of the health budget. But poor nutrition, which can be fixed with proper government support, is crippling the nation,” said Ms Hewat.

She said poor diet is the leading preventable cause of ill health in Australia and globally, contributing to almost 18 per cent of deaths in Australiaⁱ, while obesity costs the nation \$58 billion a yearⁱⁱ.

“Removing the Medicare rebate freeze is a first step, but to keep Australians out of hospital and living well, this must be backed up by coordinated approach to prevention,” said Ms Hewat.

For further information or to organise an interview with Claire Hewat, contact Felicity Curtin, Dietitians Association of Australia, on 0409 661 920.

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

ⁱⁱ 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.