



Aged Care Workforce Strategy

March 2018

The Dietitians Association of Australia (DAA) is the national association of the dietetic profession with over 6400 members, and branches in each state and territory. DAA is a leader in nutrition and advocates for food and nutrition for healthier people and healthier nations. DAA appreciates the opportunity to provide feedback on the Aged Care Workforce Strategy by the Australian Government.

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About the Dietitians Association of Australia (DAA)

The DAA is the peak body for dietitians in Australia. DAA accredits training courses for dietitians in Australia and is the assessing authority for the Australian Government for dietitians trained overseas.

The Association is a member of the National Alliance of Self Regulating Health Professions and is responsible for the Accredited Practising Dietitian (APD) program. The APD credential provides an assurance of quality and is required by Medicare, Department of Veteran's Affairs, the NDIS and private health funds.

APDs possess skills and knowledge in clinical nutrition, public health/community health and food service/food industry. In Australia dietitians are also nutritionists, but the reverse is not true. Roles of dietitians are outlined in the Appendix.

DAA interest in this consultation

Food and nutrition are primary factors in the physical, mental and social health and wellbeing of people throughout the lifecycle. The cost to individuals and the community of the burden of chronic disease related to diet is well recognised. Older people have specific nutrition requirements and frail older Australians are at risk of malnutrition, either in the community or in residential aged care. It is important that the professionals, VET sector trained workers and others in the aged care workforce have the skills and knowledge to prevent ill-health or to provide evidence-based interventions when food or nutrition related problems are identified.

Professional workforce

DAA supports the development and implementation of a comprehensive and well-funded aged care workforce strategy.

DAA recommends that the Workforce Strategy include consideration of the dietetic workforce as the food and nutrition experts. Also, that other health professionals who have a role in identifying nutrition related health problems, and in providing basic nutrition support to older Australians.

The Workforce Strategy should address issues such as

- Data collection and monitoring of all allied health professions, including those from the self-regulated professions to inform workforce development.
- Research into particular workforce needs, such as the work done recently by the Victorian Government into the Allied Health Workforce.

- Innovative approaches to providing placement experiences in the aged care sector in the training of allied health professionals, including dietitians.
- Post graduate mentoring, supervision and clinical governance approaches for allied health professionals, including dietitians to promote high quality practise by new entrants to the aged care sector, especially those in sole practice.

VET sector workforce

The Workforce Strategy should recognise there is competing and complementary demand for care workers in aged care, mental health, disability and health. Some workers may move from sector to sector, and some may work in multipurpose agencies. All of these roles require competencies in food and nutrition.

Analysis by DAA of courses being reviewed in industry skills consultations shows that graduates of certificate courses may not have studied food or nutrition subjects in their courses. This is despite the need for food and nutrition skills and knowledge to assist older Australians to meet their basic needs, or to address individual requirements related to malnutrition, chronic disease etc.

DAA would like to see that VET sector training for care workers includes core subjects in food and nutrition to ensure graduates have basic skills and knowledge to support their clients, can identify when a client should be referred for professional assistance from an APD and can successfully implement the instructions provided by an APD.

Regulation of the workforce

DAA would like to see regulation proportionate to risk in programs for older Australians which are implemented in aged care, mental health, disability and health care. At present this is achieved by registration under the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency and provisions of the National Alliance of Self Regulating Health Professions. DAA also considers that red tape should be avoided where regulation presents a barrier to entry to the private sector.

To illustrate this point, health ministers agreed through the Council of Australian Governments that a number of allied health professions presented a low risk to the public. Consequently, dietitians, speech pathologists and others were not included in the registration processes under the governance of the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency. Those allied health professions which were registered by the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency demonstrated a low risk to the public at the time of the review of the National Regulation and Accreditation Scheme.

This evidence has been ignored however in the development of the safeguards for the National Disability Insurance Scheme. Instead, allied health professionals will need to undertake expensive and onerous third-party certification processes to register as NDIS providers. Working with children or vulnerable adults is deemed to be high risk and will involve more involved verification. This presents a barrier to market entry, and will reduce access to health professionals by older people with disability who are eligible for the NDIS. The benefit accrued will be to third party auditors and not older people with disability.

Appendix

Roles of Accredited Practising Dietitians in aged care

APDs have various roles in helping older Australians to enjoy health and well-being, including the following:

Medical nutrition therapy

- Provide nutrition care planning and interventions for individuals in residential aged care or living in the community.

Food service in residential care, day programs, home delivered meal programs

- Lead multidisciplinary teams to ensure food and nutrition systems deliver enjoyable food which meets the needs of consumers.
- Develop food service and nutrition guidelines and policies.
- Translate nutrition specifications, food safety regulations, accreditation standards, nutrition guidelines for practical application in the management of food services to meet the needs of older people in residential care.
- Develop and review recipes and menus. Provide advice on recipe modification and procurement for all diets.

Risk management

- Lead the development, implementation and evaluation of malnutrition screening and assessment programs in residential care and community settings.

Community programs

- Lead community food and nutrition programs to keep older people healthy who are living in their own home, including programs which enhance household food security by improved meal planning, budgeting, shopping, food preparation and cooking skills.

Public health programs

- Lead public health food and nutrition programs to keep older people healthy who are living in their own home.

Communications

- Develop and disseminate evidence-based and practical information about nutrition for older people through the print media, social media and other media.

Training

- Contribute nutrition and dietetic skills and knowledge to multidisciplinary teams to provide direct intervention and/or to support other health professionals or care workers in residential care settings and the community.
- Training of students, nursing staff, other health professionals and care workers in general nutrition for healthy older people, nutrition for frail older people and nutrition for older people with special dietary requirements.

Food industry

- Contribute to the development of food and beverage products to meet the needs of older people.