



Medicare Benefit Schedule Review Taskforce-Pain Management Clinical Committee

The Dietitians Association of Australia (DAA) is the national association of the dietetic profession with over 6900 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 Medicare Benefits Schedule Review Taskforce *Draft report from the Pain Management Clinical Committee*.

DAA acknowledges the high burden that pain places on both the patient and Australian healthcare system and welcomes the Medicare Benefit Scheme review of the items related to pain. The Accredited Practising Dietitian (APD) program is the foundation for self-regulation of the profession, and a public assurance of safety and quality. APDs play a key role in pain management as they have the training, skills and knowledge to provide evidence-based interventions using medical nutrition therapy. APDs work with other health professionals to provide nutrition advice to those with pain to reduce the burden of disease.

DAA supports the recommendations to include additional items to allow those living with chronic pain to receive person-centred care and access a multidisciplinary pain management team under Medicare. It is accepted practice in some public health service programs for dietitians to contribute to pain management programs and for nutrition related resources to be provided to people living with chronic pain. For example, the Pain Management Network supported by the Agency for Clinical Innovation at New South Wales Health demonstrates the value of lifestyle modification in its *Managing of Chronic Pain* webpage.¹ Consequently, DAA recommend that the multidisciplinary teams providing services under Medicare include dietitians to increase accessibility in the community to individuals and to support the work of other professionals in pain and lifestyle management.

Osteoarthritis is one of many conditions contributing to the burden of pain in Australia. The 2018 Royal Australian College of General Practitioners *Guidelines for the management of knee and hip osteoarthritis* include a strong recommendation for weight management for people with knee and/or hip osteoarthritis who are overweight or obese.² Additionally, a 2018 meta-analysis by Hall et al. found that a combined diet and exercise intervention resulted in moderate improvements in pain for people with knee osteoarthritis who are overweight or obese.³ Given the role dietary interventions and dietitians play in weight management and symptom improvement in osteoarthritis, it is important that dietitians are included in the multidisciplinary team for pain management and the related Medicare item numbers. The importance of a dietitian in multidisciplinary teams to manage people living with arthritis is highlighted in both the RACGP Osteoarthritis guidelines and the Arthritis Australia document, *Time to Move: Osteoarthritis, A national strategy to reduce a costly burden*.^{2,4} People living with chronic pain should have access to dietetic interventions individually, within group programs and via telehealth.

DAA understand that a requirement for allied health professionals to provide services under the proposed additional Medicare items will be to have pain management accreditation, specified by relevant colleges or professional bodies. DAA has a strong professional framework for APDs with clear entry level standards, ongoing professional requirements, and clear documents including scope of practice, code of conduct and statement of ethical practice. APDs have, for years, managed many individuals with complex, chronic diseases under the Allied Health Medicare items without need for an additional

accreditation which may present a barrier to access to services. As such, DAA recommend that APDs could provide appropriate interventions for pain management, within existing professional frameworks which require APDs to undertake professional education to provide safe, high-quality services.

References:

1. Agency for Clinical Innovation, NSW Government. Management of Chronic Pain [Internet]. 2019. Available from: <https://www.aci.health.nsw.gov.au/chronic-pain/health-professionals/management-of-chronic-pain>
2. The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners. Guideline for the management of knee and hip osteoarthritis. 2nd edn. East Melbourne, Vic: RACGP, 2018.
3. Hall M, Castelein B, Wittoek R, Calders P, Van Ginckel A. Diet-induced weight loss alone or combined with exercise in overweight or obese people with knee osteoarthritis: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Semin Arthritis Rheum*. 2019 Apr; 48(5): 765-777
4. Arthritis Australia. Time to Move: Osteoarthritis. A national strategy to reduce a costly burden. Arthritis Australia, 2014. Available from: <https://arthritisaustralia.com.au/programs-research/advocacy-policy/reports/>