

Tuesday 16 July 2019

Mistreatment results in malnutrition: the faceless abuser in aged care

Appearing before the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety, DAA CEO Robert Hunt and Sharon Lawrence APD called for nutrition to be elevated within all aspects of aged care to help reduce the devastating impact of malnutrition, which is currently prevalent in approximately 58% of older Australians.

Speaking in Cairns this afternoon, DAA provided evidence of the significant levels of malnutrition in aged care, and the critical nutrition improvements needed to ensure better clinical and quality of life outcomes for older Australians.

“Access to food and nutrition is a basic human right, which is essential for the physical, mental, social and emotional wellbeing for older Australians. Ultimately, food and nutrition must be a shared responsibility and Accredited Practising Dietitians (APDs) are the only trained professionals who are able to lead the solution to the malnutrition crisis in aged care,” said Mr Hunt.

During their testimony, Hunt and Lawrence highlighted the need for accountability and significant funding to support nutrition within aged care. This could be achieved through the development and implementation of a National Nutrition Policy that encompasses the health of all older Australians – living both in the community and in residential aged care.

This policy would address the critical aspects needed to elevate nutrition, including:

- A public health awareness campaign to increase understanding into the nutrition needs of older Australians.
- Nutrition education as a core component of aged care training, through formal courses, and on-going professional development delivered by APDs.
- Regular malnutrition screening by GPs, community care services and residential aged care.
- Adequate referral pathways and access to ensure older Australians are able receive dietetic care.
- Well-communicated nutrition care planning facilitated by an APD.
- The planning and delivery of meal services to incorporate an assessment by an APD to ensure the nutrition needs of older Australians are met.
- Home delivered and centre-based programs comply to National Meal Guidelines.
- Priority given to mealtimes, including appropriate support, assistance and modifications needed to aid meal consumption, to maximise food and fluid intake by older Australians.

“We would be disturbed if we fed our children the same way our older Australians are currently being fed. We cannot let elder abuse through poor nutrition continue any longer.”

ENDS

For further information or to organise an interview with Robert Hunt, contact Pattie King, Dietitians Association of Australia on 0409 661 920