Australian Academy of Science | NATIONAL COMMITTEE FOR **NUTRITION**

NOURISHING AUSTRALIA POLICY BRIEF

PILLAR 4 EDUCATION AND RESEARCH TRAINING

Executive summary

Dietary patterns at certain life stages, such as early life and pregnancy, can have a defining impact on an individual's lifelong health prospects.

Individuals' food choices are determined by internal and external factors including taste preferences, cost and availability, marketing, individual nutrition knowledge, cooking skills, cultural and religious beliefs, attitudes and motivations.

Empowering individuals to adopt healthy dietary patterns requires differentiating evidence-based information from all other messaging, through clear communication of nutrition science.

Context, challenges and opportunities

Globally, poor dietary patterns are responsible for more deaths than any other modifiable risk factor in non-communicable disease, excluding smoking.

- High body mass index and metabolic conditions such as hyperglycaemia and hypertension may be preventable and treatable by optimising dietary patterns and increasing activity across the population.

Optimising dietary patterns can substantially improve individual health and wellbeing, enhancing human capital and national economic prosperity.

- Targeted nutrition interventions at specific life stages, including early life and pregnancy, can have profound impacts on the long-term health of individuals and their children.

Consistent and credible communication of nutrition information with a consistent trusted voice is essential for enhancing individual dietary patterns from early childhood onwards in order to improve population health outcomes.

- Nutrition and diet messaging is currently a complex mix of credible, evidence-based information, commercial food advertising, misinformation and unsubstantiated opinions.
- There is no clear delineation and individuals are required to synthesise the 'truth' from which to guide their dietary decisions.

Growing the workforce of professional individuals in the science of nutrition and establishing a new unified regulatory system to oversee professional conduct and credentialing is key to fostering informed dietary decisions and safeguarding the public against poor advice.

- Cultivating a workforce capable of meeting the challenges of an integrated approach to nutrition and capable of managing complexity requires a breadth of expertise spanning all aspects of the food chain (from production to consumption) together with individuals who can engage with stakeholders at all levels.
- Nutrition science professionals have a key role to play in dissemination of nutrition education to other health professionals. This will increase the capacity of the current health workforce to collectively impact the nutritional health of the population.
- Strengthening professional nutrition workforce and education opportunities allows Australia to position itself as the leading nutrition education provider to the Asia–Pacific region.

Recommendations and actions needed

Recommendation 1: (a) All professional nutritionists undertake competency-based education; and (b) all nutrition courses adopt a code of ethics and their graduates are fit to practice

Ensuring evidence-based nutrition advice from qualified nutrition professionals is easily identifiable would enable the public to make informed dietary choices and improve health and wellbeing. This requires a framework for oversight and accountability.

Recommendation 2: Harness the scope and reach of social media, the internet and other mass communication channels to enable nutrition professionals to communicate to the public effectively and efficiently

Greater public understanding of nutrition science would improve consumer food choices and dietary patterns. Enhancing the impact of evidence-based nutrition messages and boosting engagement with consumer groups requires communicating complex nutrition issues with a unified voice.

Recommendation 3: Integrate nutrition education, including food skills, across all formal education (early childhood, school, TAFE and tertiary)

Equipping every Australian with basic cooking skills and an understanding of how nutrition and food decisions impacts the long-term health of individuals and their families would encourage improved dietary patterns. Developing public knowledge of nutrition to drive beneficial dietary decisions requires greater population-wide education on nutrition issues.

Recommendation 4: Ensure evidence-based teaching, including societal determinants and the ethics of precision and personalised nutrition, are core competencies in all accredited and professional development courses

Actively engaging the public in nutrition research and discourse would streamline translation of scientific developments into beneficial public health outcomes.

Effective communication of evidence-based nutrition messages requires upskilling nutrition professionals, especially in emerging research areas that impact on practice and public understanding of the science of nutrition.

Recommendation 5: (a) Develop clear career pathways and opportunities in research, public health and advocacy roles; and (b) develop a training framework of competency from basic to advanced levels in line with these career pathways

Positioning Australia as a leader in the education and training of nutrition researchers, educators and public health nutritionists would boost workforce capabilities in Australia and develop regional capacity to address the pressing health burden of major non-communicable diseases. Addressing the perceived lack of career pathways and opportunities is needed to grow the number of nutrition professionals in Australia.

Recommendation 6: Incorporate leadership training in professional development courses by leveraging existing nutrition leadership platforms, such as the Oceanic Nutrition Leadership Platform

Fostering a network of nutrition leaders would drive development and accelerate implementation of nutrition policies and public health strategies with lasting impact for health and wellbeing in Australia. This requires training and development programs which reflect the multidisciplinary nature of the modern science of nutrition.

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