

## **Shocking New Report Highlights Older People are at Serious Risk from Malnutrition**

The British Dietetic Association is supporting the National Association of Care Catering (NACC) Community Meals Week (11-17 October 2010). This will involve a week of events around the UK raising the profile of meals served in the local community.

The BDA is also adding its voice to the NACC's call to action to introduce a National Standard to help older people receive the meal service they deserve.

One in 10 older people in the UK are at risk from malnutrition according to a new report launched this week by the NACC. With figures showing that by 2033 an estimated 23% of the UK population will be aged over 65 and a further 3.2m aged over 80, the number of older people suffering from malnutrition is set to rise even further, highlighting the need to address how older people are supported into older age now before the problem gets even worse.

In order to tackle the issues raised in the report the NACC has announced the launch of a Nutrition Standard which will provide an up to date guideline for those providing community meals services. The NACC, supported by the BDA, are urging the government to support this to help lower the risk of malnutrition for older people.

The '**Personalisation, Nutrition and the Role of Community Meals**' report has uncovered some shocking findings, including:

- Despite government promises there will be more choice of care in later life, community meal services for the elderly are disappearing as Local Authorities have no legal obligation to provide them
- Many who suffer from conditions such as Alzheimer's are seeing their illness deteriorate further due to bad nutrition and lack of care
- Older people at risk from malnutrition aren't being identified early enough due to lack of interaction with meal service providers
- Service providers are forced to have minimal contact with elderly people due to budget constraints, leaving many at risk from malnutrition and further illness
- Many older people are forced into care homes as they become ill due to malnutrition and aren't offered the support they need before they become malnourished
- Pushing older people into care homes is likely to cost the UK taxpayer more than if they were able to stay in their own home
- There are currently two sets of guidelines for nutrition in community meals services, making it hard for Local Authorities to compare service providers
- The lack of standard measures also means older people face a lottery of services throughout the UK
- There is a lack of awareness about the right nutrition for older people
- Many older people's safety is at risk as those hired by direct care do not need official checks, leaving them vulnerable

## **Single Nutritional Standard**

In a bid to improve meal services for the whole of the UK the NACC and the Caroline Walker Trust have agreed a single Nutrition Standard to be used by all in the sector, helping improve the nutritional content of food. Using two nutritional guidelines has led to problems for Local Authorities in regulating services, causing huge variations in nutritional care throughout the UK. The NACC believes the introduction of this new standard will help ensure all older people have access to food with the correct nutritional content, lowering the risk of malnutrition. The Standard not only provides a clear benchmark for the nutritional content of food, but also gives guidance on hydration, food intolerances, special dietary requirements and food labeling.

## **Current government guidance**

Current government nutrition guidance does not give clear nutritional advice for older people. Recommendations from the Food Standards Agency (FSA) include all ages from 65 upwards, but the needs of older people change with increasing age. There is little guidance available on the risk of being underweight for the elderly. In order to tackle the problem of malnutrition the government must support the Nutrition Standard and recognize the role of good nutrition for the elderly.

Derek Johnson, NACC Chairman said: “The Nutrition Standard will ensure consistency in the nutritional content of food provided throughout the care catering sector. The launch of the standard builds on the ‘10 Key Characteristics for Good Nutritional Care’ initiative launched last month. It is however still vital that government support this standard and are committed to providing care for the elderly, not only allowing them a real choice in care services, but also saving the NHS money in the years to come.”

The Chairman of the British Dietetic Association, Helen Davidson, added: “The findings highlighted by the NACC are very worrying indeed and clearly demonstrate the need to have in place the correct guidelines to ensure all the issues raised are adequately addressed. On behalf of the British Dietetic Association, I fully welcome this campaign and support it fully.”

## **Baroness Greengross**

The report, compiled from a roundtable discussion chaired by Baroness Greengross, points out good nutrition is not just about food, but also about care service provision. To give older people the support they need, community meal provision and access to food should be considered as a core part of the social care package provided for all older people.

“The report identifies those working in the care catering sector as being in an ideal position to monitor the health of older people and encourage them to eat well, lowering the risk of malnutrition,” explains Derek Johnson. “Regular delivery of meals to the home is key to ensuring older people have regular contact with others. However, the need for Local Authorities to cut costs due to slashed budgets has led to a reduction in these services, with personalisation reduced to the lowest common denominator in some cases, meaning social interaction and its vital role in good health is ignored. The government must support both a Nutrition Standard and the 10 Key Characteristics launched last month to ensure older people get the type of care they need.”

### **Referral process for Community Meals should be opened up**

Changes in how older people are referred for care catering services has also had a negative impact on the number of older people at risk from malnutrition. When considering who needs the service only those who are already suffering from malnourishment are recommended, leaving the number at risk from malnourishment growing. As a result the NACC believe the referral process for community meal provision needs to be opened up to include older people who are at risk, preventing them from falling into the cycle of malnutrition. Using a screening tool such as the British Association for Parental and Enteral Nutrition's (BAPEN) Malnutrition Universal Screening Tool (MUST)<sup>1</sup> will help to identify the risk, and lead to services being put in place to prevent further deterioration.

Malnutrition among older people can lead to increased hospital stay, increased readmission rates and increased transfer and admission to care homes, all of which costs the government money. Investing in the care catering sector rather than cutting these services will actually help save money in the long term. For example, research in Australia has shown that spending £1 on good nutrition is likely to save £5 on the health budget as care packages are reduced.

By investing in these recommended changes the NACC believe the government will be securing the care of older people both now and in the future. This will not only provide a Nutrition Standard, ensuring all food in the care catering sector is of a good nutritional content, but will also introduce a joined up service where the health and well being of older people is crucial.

For a copy of the full report log on to [www.ilcuk.org.uk](http://www.ilcuk.org.uk)



---

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.bapen.org.uk/musttoolkit.html>