



Press Release

For immediate release

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“We Will Work Hard to Close the Hunger Gap” Islington Council Signs up to BDA Campaign

The British Dietetic Association (BDA) has launched a brand new national campaign called **Mind the Hunger Gap** (November 2011) and Islington Council is the first local authority in the UK to sign up to its principles.

The campaign will involve calling on all dietitians in the UK to highlight the “national disgrace” that involves around 1,000,000 (one million) older people in the UK suffering from malnutrition. This figure does not include those older people in a hospital or care setting, it is those older people living in our community or, as they have become, the ‘invisible’ population.

Malnutrition does not discriminate and impacts on people regardless of age, gender or race.

While The World Health Organization cites malnutrition as *the* greatest single threat to the world’s public health, it is still widely believed that malnutrition is restricted to the third world population. Quite simply, it is not.

For the first time, the BDA launched **Mind the Hunger Gap** as an online-based campaign and dietitians will be directed to the campaign website (www.mindthehungergap.com) to download various materials and campaign tools to highlight the issue locally, while the BDA will raise the issue on a national level.

While primarily a dietitian-led campaign, the **Mind the Hunger Gap** website also has various tools that members of the public can use to add their support.

Speaking about being the first local authority in the UK to sign up to **Mind the Hunger Gap**, Leader of Islington Council Cllr. Catherine West, said:

"It is a sad indictment on our society that too many older people are missing meals due to poverty or illness. I am firmly on the side of these people, who have been described as the 'invisible' population.

"In Islington we are determined to get to grips with this problem and are providing older people with access to healthy meals.

"We have frozen the price of our 'Meals on Wheels' and have kept open all of our day centres which host lunch clubs for older people. In 2010 we cancelled the Leader's Christmas party to spend the money instead on a hot Christmas lunch for 100 pensioners – and we'll be doing the same again in 2011.

"In addition we have increased funding for *Help on your Doorstep*: an organisation which specifically works with isolated people and saved the Plus Bus, because we understand that older people will find it easier to access nutritious and affordable meals when they are connected to the wider community.

"I am delighted to support the BDA's campaign and will work hard to close the hunger gap."

The **Mind the Hunger Gap** will call for local and national support to highlight:

- Malnutrition costs over £13 billion across the UK. It is vital to protect current services, and extend provision to reduce these spiralling costs of care packages and readmissions.
- Protect one meal a day by ring-fencing funding for community meal provision at a local level.
- Dietitians have the expertise to lead the nutrition pathway across the whole health and social care system.
- Social isolation and fragmented services have left older people excluded and invisible. Food is a basic human right and it's everybody's responsibility to stamp out starvation in their community.
- With social care budgets being devolved for local implementation, there is an opportunity now to plan and promote collaborative solutions at a local level.

The **Mind the Hunger Gap** campaign website can be found out www.mindthehungergap.com with campaign tools for the dietetic profession and

wider public. Campaign tools will be added to and developed as the campaign progresses, so please check back from time to time.

Importantly, the campaign website will also feature an easy to use checklist tool so members of the public who are worried about family members, friends and neighbours can make an easy, unintrusive initial assessment with tips and ideas of what to do next.

ENDS

**For more information / interview requests, please contact the BDA Press Office on
0870 850 2517**

Notes to the Editor:

- **Mind the Hunger Gap Facts & Figures**

More than 3 million people in the UK are at risk of malnutrition with the vast majority, about 93%, living in the community setting, 5% in residential care and 2% in hospital

One million older people in the United Kingdom eat less than one meal a day.

Greater use of healthcare and costs associated with malnutrition mean:

- 65% more GP visits;
- 82% more hospital admissions;
- 30% longer hospital stay.

The health and social care costs in the United Kingdom directly associated with malnutrition comes to more than £13 billion per annum (based on 2007 prices).

Problems associated with malnutrition include:

- Poorer immune responses, meaning the likelihood of infections and ill health is greatly increased.
- Reduced muscle strength.
- Weaker respiratory (breathing) muscles, which result in breathing problems and frequent chest infections.
- More difficulty keeping warm.
- Slower wound healing and longer time needed to recover from illness.
- Low mood, little interest in everyday activities and self neglect.
- Increased amount of admissions and readmissions to hospital, and longer time spent on each admission.
- Increased difficulty conceiving.

In the fight against malnutrition, dietitians should:

- Provide specialised dietary advice.
- Be involved in the early stages once a patient has been screened.
- Be an integral member of the secondary and primary care teams.
- Help devise and implement effective nutrition policy locally.

- Take a lead in the coordinating a nutrition steering committee/group in the hospital and community environment to ensure provision of appropriate nutritional management, care pathways and monitoring happens.
 - Offer appropriate nutrition advice on an individual/group level.
 - Train and support other healthcare professionals on how to identify risk of malnutrition.
 - Assess an individual's nutritional/dietary requirements.
 - Contribute to delivering cost effective services.
- Visit the BDA website at www.bda.uk.com
 - Visit the **Mind the Hunger Gap** campaign website at www.mindthehungergap.com
 - The British Dietetic Association, founded in 1936, is the professional association for registered dietitians in Great Britain and Northern Ireland. It is the nation's largest organisation of food and nutrition professionals with over 6,000 members.
 - Dietitians are the only nutrition professionals to be statutorily regulated, and governed by an ethical code, to ensure that they always work to the highest standard. Dietitians work in the NHS, private practice, industry, education, research, sport, media, public relations, publishing, Non Government Organisations and government. Their advice influences food and health policy across the spectrum from government, local communities and individuals.