

Tackling malnutrition through dietetic leadership

The challenge

- Disease-related malnutrition costs the NHS and social care system ~£22 billion annually². Of this, nearly £200³ million is spent each year on oral nutritional supplements (ONS). Much of this cost is avoidable with better pathways.

- Malnourished patients cost over three times more to treat than well-nourished patients.

The opportunity

- Dietitians transform nutritional care across all sectors, reducing unnecessary prescribing, hospital admissions, and length of stay.

- Evidence shows that dietetic-led pathways deliver savings of up to £641,000 per 100,000 population⁴.

- Multiple studies across England confirm that dietitians working across primary, community, and secondary care consistently reduce costs and improve outcomes⁵.

Policy ask

- Commit to embedding dietetic-led malnutrition pathways in every Integrated Care System (ICS).

- This allows the dietetic workforce to lead system-wide change, ensuring consistent, evidence-based nutritional care

Outcomes that align with NHS priorities

- Hospital → Community: Dietitians prevent avoidable admissions and support earlier discharge.

- Sickness → Prevention: Proactive nutritional care reduces complications and dependency.

- Efficiency & Value: Every £1 invested in dietetic-led malnutrition management returns at least £10 in savings.

Value demonstration

- Well-nourished patients are healthier, need fewer hospital resources, and achieve better outcomes.

- Strengthening nutrition pathways using the dietetic workforce is a high-value, prevention-first investment that delivers measurable returns for the taxpayer and supports the NHS 10-Year Health Plan.

¹ <https://tinyurl.com/2fm2ey82>

² <https://www.kingsfund.org.uk/insight-and-analysis/blogs/malnutrition-pandoras-box-health-care>

³ <https://tinyurl.com/3p4hsmyb>

⁴ <https://tinyurl.com/y4kubrns>

⁵ <https://www.bda.uk.com/specialist-groups-and-branches/first-contact-dietitians-specialist-group/evidence-from-practice/malnutrition-and-frailty.html>