



9 September 2014

Dear Director General,

The Dietitians Association of Australia, Nutrition Australia, the Nutrition Society of Australia and the Public Health Association of Australia acknowledge recent efforts of State and Territory governments to improve the food supply and nutrition education in Australian schools.

This primarily includes each State and Territory governments' school nutrition guidelines, which give practical guidance for schools to increase the availability of healthier food and drinks, and decrease the availability of unhealthy items, based on the Australian Dietary Guidelinesⁱ.

Furthermore, the 2010 National Healthy School Canteen Guidelinesⁱⁱ 'build on activities of State and Territory governments and encourage a nationally-consistent approach to promoting healthy food through Australian school canteens'.

The Australian Dietary Guidelines use the 'best available scientific evidence to give Australians information on the types and amounts of foods, food groups and dietary patterns that aim to promote health and wellbeing, reduce the risk of diet-related conditions, and reduce the risk of chronic disease'.

The revised Guidelines were released in 2013 by the Commonwealth Department of Health, and were developed by the National Health and Medical Research Council (including a committee of independent experts in the field of nutrition), based on a large body of scientific evidence (more than 55,000 studies).

We have recently learnt of a new program titled '**Healthy School Lunches**', which celebrity chef Pete Evans has stated will be promoted to primary schools across Australia from 2015. Healthy School Lunches is a program based on the promotion of a version of the 'Paleo Diet'.

Initiatives which inspire an interest in food and nutrition, and teach children cooking skills are to be applauded, but the Healthy School Lunches proposal has some major problems. It:

- Contradicts the evidence-based recommendations of the Australian Dietary Guidelines
- Discourages healthy core foods (in this case, dairy foods, grain-based foods and legumes)
- Undermines the messages promoted by teachers working with curricula based on evidence-based nutrition science, and
- Has the potential to risk the health of children.



Pete Evans has indicated his intention not to follow the Australian Dietary Guidelines in this extract of a post on his Facebook page, regarding his Healthy School Lunches program:

'A lot of people asked why I won't be following the current Dietary Guidelines with the recipes I create and if anyone would like to do a bit more homework then please read Denise Mingers wonderfully researched book "Death by Food Pyramid" for more information - this should be a text book that every child and parent read.'

We are concerned that if the Healthy School Lunches program were to enter schools (most likely through individual approaches to specific schools), it could undermine existing State/Territory and Federal initiatives. Furthermore, it could confuse children and parents about what to eat to learn well, grow well and prevent obesity and diet-related chronic diseases.

The recent Australian Health Surveyⁱⁱⁱ confirms that many school-aged children are not meeting recommended intakes of two core food groups discouraged under the Paleo Diet: milk foods or alternatives, and wholegrain foods. Children need to eat adequate amounts, not less, of these foods to help ensure they meet their nutrition needs (including for brain development), and are setting up good eating habits for life-long health^{iv}.

We trust that health and education authorities are alert to the risks associated with celebrities promoting their version of fad diets that are inconsistent with evidence-based, peer-reviewed science and which contradict government guidelines and policies. Their personal opinions on food and nutrition can reach a wide audience, including school principals and other members of school communities, but may be overly-simplistic, misleading and without scientific basis.

Australian health and education systems have a key responsibility to promote and support the overall wellbeing and healthy development of children in our schools.

The Dietitians Association of Australia, Nutrition Australia, the Nutrition Society of Australia and the Public Health Association of Australia call upon the State and Territory governments to continue to support the application of the evidence-based Australian Dietary Guidelines in efforts to improve the food supply in schools, over unproven and potentially dangerous messages and programs.

This is a crucial step towards improving the health of Australians, particularly children.

Yours sincerely,

Claire Hewat AdvAPD
CEO, Dietitians Association of Australia



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Lucinda Hancock'.

Lucinda Hancock
Executive Officer, Nutrition Australia Victorian Division, on behalf of Nutrition Australia

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Malcolm Riley'.

Malcolm Riley
President, Nutrition Society of Australia

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Michael Moore'.

CEO, Public Health Association of Australia



About the organisations:

The **Dietitians Association of Australia** is the national association of the dietetic profession with more than 5,500 members and branches in each state and territory. The Association is a leader in nutrition and advocates for better food, better health, and wellbeing for all.

Nutrition Australia is a non-profit organisation that aims to promote optimal health and inspire healthy eating, through nutrition education, information and advisory services across Australia.

The **Nutrition Society of Australia** is a society of qualified scientists and educators from diverse disciplines with a common interest in the promotion of nutrition science and its applications.

The **Public Health Association of Australia** is a national organisation comprising around 1900 individual members and representing over 40 professional groups concerned with the promotion of health at a population level. With Branches in each jurisdiction and a series of Special Interest Groups the key roles of the organisation include the development of policy, capacity building and advocacy based on principles of equity.

ⁱ Australian Dietary Guidelines (2013). National Health and Medical Research Council. Available at: <http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/guidelines/publications/n55>

ⁱⁱ 2010 National Healthy School Canteen Guidelines. Australian Government Department of Health. Available at: <http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/phd-nutrition-canteens>

ⁱⁱⁱ Australian Health Survey: Nutrition First Results – Food and Nutrients, 2011-12. Australian Bureau of Statistics. Available at: <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/4364.0.55.007main+features12011-12>