

National Nutrition Centre and nutrition survey

A strong commitment from Government is needed in the area of nutrition. To date not enough commitment to this issue has been shown. Although the solutions to the obesity epidemic are multifaceted and will require commitment from all levels of government over a sustained period there needs to be a much greater focus on correct nutrition. At present much emphasis is upon exercise which has a role in being healthy but a relatively limited role in reducing obesity. The AMA believes nutrition is the key. Therefore the AMA calls on the government to establish an independent National Nutrition Centre. **This would require an annual investment of at least \$10 million.**

It is important that the Centre is independent of the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing, and the statutory authority, Food Standards Australia New Zealand because this would increase the credibility of its advice to policy makers within the Government Departments. In addition to its role of independent adviser the National Nutrition Centre would have a number of roles and responsibilities including to:

- Conduct population wide national nutrition surveys include blood and urine analysis
- Provide research grants to academics to support further research and a better understanding of what constitutes a health diet
- Provide showcase opportunities for evidence based interventions
- Develop resources and education material for professionals including doctors, teachers, allied health professionals etc
- Develop resources including a public awareness campaign around nutrition including understanding food labelling
- Have a designated unit / area focusing on the nutritional status of Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders with an initial focus on maternal nutrition and LBW babies
- Have funding for nation wide programs such as one to ensure access to fresh fruit and vegetables in rural and remote Australia
- Accredite weight loss centres / approaches / fads

These roles and responsibilities would develop overtime. By bringing all these roles and responsibilities under one umbrella the AMA believes this would both show the government's commitment to the issue but also ensure a coherent and comprehensive approach to the issue.

One of its first activities should be to undertake a comprehensive nation wide nutrition survey. **To do this properly would probably require a \$10 million investment every 10 years.** Politicians, bureaucrats, researchers and policy makers need to have a very clear picture of Australia's current nutritional status. The last national nutrition survey was conducted in Australia ten years ago. The Government recently announced its intention to collect dietary and physical activity data from Australian children. This initiative was partly funded by the Food and Grocery Council. There is some commitment for this initiative to eventually collect data on other population groups, however it is crucial that this happens in a timely manner. In addition, there needs to be an ongoing commitment to re-collect such data for comparison in years to come.