

# Nutrition & Dietetics

Journal of Dietitians Australia

Volume 77 Supplement 1 August 2020

**Dietitians Australia 37th National Conference  
23–25 August 2020  
Melbourne, Australia**

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Journal of Dietitians Australia

**Volume 77 Supplement 1 August 2020**

**ISSN 1446-6368**

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# Nutrition & Dietetics

Journal of Dietitians Australia

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NDI.JEB.Jul20

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## EDITORIAL

## This too shall pass

This editorial would traditionally start with “Welcome to Melbourne for the Dietitians Australia 2020 Conference”; but this year the conference has turned out very differently. The Scientific and Social Program Committee set out to plan a memorable conference for 2020 in Melbourne; and memorable it will be in its absence.

This year the world changed when a novel coronavirus and the disease it causes (COVID-19) took hold. As of 19 May 2020, worldwide there have been 4 696 849 confirmed COVID-19 cases and 315 131 deaths<sup>1</sup>; while in Australia, there have been 7068 cases and 99 deaths.<sup>2</sup>

In March this year, the number of confirmed cases in Australia was increasing exponentially and the country braced for the COVID-19 crisis seen in Europe and the United States. To combat the disease, a series of restrictions was put in place by Federal and State Governments to flatten the disease curve. Restrictions included banning mass gatherings and grounding domestic and international travel. Both of these are essential components of a successful conference, so the difficult decision was made to move the conference to 2021. A blow softened by the fact that these restrictions have successfully flattened the COVID-19 curve in Australia.

The Dietitians Australia 2020 Conference was to be an important year in the history of the conference. The conference theme “*Discover, Grow, Evolve*” set the tone for an exciting program. The major conference themes were Sustainability, Leadership and Translation and Implementation. The conference theme described not only the content but also the new conference structure. In 2018, the Conference Redesign Committee conducted an extensive review of the existing conference structure. The 2020 Scientific and Social Program Committee was working hard to translate the review recommendations into a reinvigorated and revamped program. Some of the changes planned for 2020 included a streamlined 2-day conference program; *Grow your Career*: a preconference program specifically designed for emerging dietitians; *Evolve your Practice*: a concurrent preconference program with longer workshops for dietitians to extend their practice; and new session types such as symposiums, rapid fire presentations and the revival of e-posters. The conference also served as a timely event to celebrate and recognise 90 years of dietetics in Victoria.

To acknowledge the hard work of authors who submitted abstracts for Melbourne 2020 (the scheduled

abstract close occurred amidst the escalating crisis in Australia), the submitted abstracts are presented within this supplement of *Nutrition & Dietetics*. The abstracts encompass the breadth and diversity of dietetic practice in Australia, and support the conference themes. In addition to this supplement, Dietitians Australia will be presenting a virtual plenary program in August to safely deliver the impressive keynote speaker program on Sustainability, Leadership and Implementation and Translation.

I would like to thank the very hardworking 2020 Scientific and Social Program Committee for their creative and energetic contributions to the program development over the last 12 months. I am confident that the many ideas and innovations generated by the committee will find a home in the 2021 conference program.

The Dietitians Australia 2021 Conference in Melbourne will be an important time for the dietetic profession to *Discover, Grow and Evolve* beyond COVID-19. Our profession is not immune to the societal, health or economic impacts of COVID-19. How has the dietetic workforce fared in 2020? Food security will be a challenge for many months to come; illustrated by the imagery of empty supermarket shelves and Centrelink queues stretching around the block. What will be the impact of this on the health of Australians? In the face of the crisis, incredible volumes of work have been achieved. In a matter of weeks, we saw the swift mobilisation of telehealth for allied health professionals, universities converted entire curricula to online learning, and clinical dietitians wrote and published COVID-19 management guidelines. What can we learn from these monumental practice shifts?

As we emerge from our self-isolation trenches and reform as a profession after COVID-19 under the banner of Dietitians Australia, there will be wounds to heal, there will be victories to celebrate and there will so much to learn and discover about dietetics in this post-COVID world. I look forward to sharing our experiences together in 2021.

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