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Who is seeing the Dietitian? Are

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Poor dietary choices are associated with overweight and obesity and the development of chronic conditions. Over 12 million (~60%) Australians are currently overweight or obese. Accredited Practising Dietitians (APDs) are the experts in nutrition and diet therapy, equipped to provide services and counselling to assist individuals in making dietary modifications to prevent or manage diet-related conditions. However, no existing research has investigated the proportion or characteristics of the Australian population that may be accessing APDs. Data from 25,906 participants in the 2004/05 National Health Survey (NHS) were analysed using logistic regression to identify the sociodemographic and health characteristics of individuals accessing an APD or Nutritionist. Only 0.4% (n=105) of the sample reported accessing a Dietitian or Nutritionist, this was half the amount accessing a Naturopath. Diabetes Mellitus, cardiovascular disease and obesity were all significantly associated with having seen a Dietitian, and over 90% of those accessing services had a long-term condition. Of the total sample only 10% of those with a diet-related condition had seen an APD or Nutritionist. Household income and education were not associated with accessing an APD. Exploration around the barriers to referral and accessing services may be warranted to assist in enhancing the profile of APDs among the population and other healthcare professionals. The current number of approximately 5000 registered APDs is unlikely to be able to service the proportion of the population who require dietary intervention; further avenues for prevention, rather than acute treatment, and novel strategies for service provision also need to be explored.

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