

Towards national indicators for food and nutrition: an AIHW view

**Reporting against the Dietary Guidelines for
Australian Adults**

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare

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Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
Canberra

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Foreword

Nutrition is a key determinant of health and wellbeing. Current evidence suggests that there are still significant nutritional issues to be addressed in Australia – many of our current health concerns are directly or indirectly related to diet. However, there is limited recent data available for ongoing nutrition monitoring and surveillance.

Towards National Indicators for Food and Nutrition: An AIHW View is a timely publication in the light of the current planning for a national food and nutrition monitoring and surveillance system, and more immediately, a Children’s National Nutrition and Physical Activity Survey.

By presenting existing measures relevant to monitoring against the Dietary Guidelines for Australian Adults, this report provides a baseline document for the development of Australian food and nutrition indicators. The AIHW supports the development of comprehensive national indicators to ensure that there is ongoing reporting.

The AIHW joins with many in the nutrition community in calling for the continued development of regular and appropriate data sources and consistent reporting of nutrition-related data. Indicators are an essential component of a comprehensive monitoring system and will be invaluable in ensuring effective development and evaluation of policy and interventions to improve the nutrition of Australians.

I would like to acknowledge Anne Marie Thow for her work in preparing this report, as well as those who gave generously of their time to referee the report.

Dr Ching Choi

Acting Director

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Abbreviations

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
AFNMU	Australian Food and Nutrition Monitoring Unit
AIHW	Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
AusDiab	Australian Diabetes, Obesity and Lifestyle Study
BMI	body mass index
CATI	computer assisted telephone interviewing
DHFS	Department of Health and Family Services
DoHA	Department of Health and Ageing
EU	European Union
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
NDNS	National Diet and Nutrition Survey (UK)
NDSA	National Dietary Survey of Adults
NDSHS	National Drug Strategy Household Survey
NHANES	National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (USA)
NHDD	National Health Data Dictionary
NHMRC	National Health and Medical Research Council
NHS	National Health Survey
NNS	National Nutrition Survey
NPAS	National Physical Activity Survey
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
RDI	recommended daily intake
RFPS	Risk Factor Prevalence Survey
SIGNAL	Strategic Inter-Governmental Nutrition Alliance
UK	United Kingdom
USA	United States of America
WHO	World Health Organization

Symbols

g	grams
kcal	kilocalories
kJ	kilojoules
mg	milligrams
ml	millilitre
mmol	millimole
ng	nanograms
nmol/L	nanomoles per litre
µg	micrograms
µg/L	micrograms per litre
µmol/L	micromoles per litre

Summary

This report provides an overview of the status of food and nutrition data in Australia, based on existing published measures relevant to the Dietary Guidelines for Australian Adults (NHMRC 2003). The purpose of the report is to assist in the development of a national food and nutrition monitoring system in Australia through informing indicator development and identifying gaps in existing data collection. This report also provides a comparison with relevant food and nutrition measures and data from a selected number of other countries.

The report follows on from and expands on the core set of indicators reported in *Key Food and Nutrition Data for Australia 1990–1999* (Marks et al. 2001a), with measures aligned to the revised Dietary Guidelines for Australian Adults. The dietary guidelines are a key statement of Australia’s policy goals and directions for supporting better nutritional outcomes for the population.

The food and nutrition data reviewed provide a status report on the nutrition of Australians. It is evident from available data relevant to the dietary guidelines that there are still important nutritional issues to be resolved in Australia. For example, more than 50% of people have reported not meeting the minimum recommendations for fruit and vegetable consumption, and data suggest a trend towards higher proportions of people being insufficiently active, and increased levels of obesity.

Although there is a large body of existing food and nutrition data pertinent to reporting against the Australian dietary guidelines, key components of these data are not collected on an ongoing basis and many are no longer recent – in particular, measures relating to dietary intakes and biomedical risk factors. There are also gaps in data availability relevant to the dietary guidelines. This lack of recent data for some areas, along with the gaps in data collection, makes it difficult to monitor changes in nutrition, and in conjunction with this, to effectively evaluate the dietary guidelines as an important policy document.

The international measures presented in this report suggest that Australian reporting of food and nutrition data has thus far been largely comparable to that in a range of similar countries. However, the measures also serve to highlight gaps in Australian data collection and suggest potential new measures that could be used to inform Australian indicator development. In addition, collating international measures has emphasised the age and non-ongoing status of much of the Australian data, as many of the countries reviewed have in place systems for collecting nutrition-related data on an ongoing basis.

The evident limitations of currently available data, in conjunction with continuing nutrition concerns, highlight the need for nationally endorsed indicators for food and nutrition in Australia to guide data collection and reporting. These indicators would be an important part of a comprehensive framework for ongoing monitoring and surveillance of Australia’s food and nutrition situation.